

**HISTORY
OF THE
KOCH
KINGDOM
1515-1615**

D Nath

This book is the first of its kind to study both political and socio-cultural aspects of a tribe that formed, along with numerous others, a state in the north-eastern region of India. The Koches belonging to the stock of the present day Meches, Garos, Rabhas, Lalungs, Hojais, Hajongs and other Bodo groups of the greater Mongoloid race established a kingdom in the western Brahmaputra valley in the early 16th century. Very soon the state extended over almost the entire north-east India at the cost of the other neighbouring tribes and for a time it was found that this was the greatest kingdom that any tribe had ever formed in the region.

Such political glory was, however, short-lived. Internal strife and external aggression made the state dwindle into insignificance. But its importance lies in other aspects as well. The Brahmins left no stone unturned to Hinduise the royal family immediately after they had acquired political power. It so happened that the near relatives of the king not only became stern followers of Brahmanical Hinduism, but also tried their best to patronise both Brahmanic and Vaishnavite cultures and institutions in the court. Sanskrit learning became an ideal of the neo-Hinduised royal family. The Brahmins and the royal officers receiving grants or assignments of land, the members of the royal household and other feudal landlords e.g. the 'Bhuyans' formed the culturally and economically advanced class. The vast masses of people remained at the bottom of the society. This is how the socio-political elite of the state acquired the identity of a separate class and the whole tribe became a caste-tribe continuum.

Besides dealing with the problem of the original habitat and racial affinity of the tribe, the rise and fall of the Koch political power is also discussed in this volume. The way of administration, the nature of the society and economy and the patronage of religion and literature by the kings are also

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(c. 1515—1615)

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Preface

Not many attempts have been made to unveil the past civilizations of the Indo-Mongoloids of north-eastern India who have since time immemorial been inhabiting this isolated geographical region. Contributing materially and otherwise to the formation of the basic cultural pattern of the region, these peoples gave an independent shape to its regional identity through the ages. At the same time, they maintained a strong unity with the rest of the country in the sphere of culture-contact and with generations of new-comers to their land. This cultural contact has played significant role in shaping the social history of the region.

A section of such Indo-Mongoloids who played a major role in the formation of the region's past civilization, were the Koches. Their rise as a political power on the ruins of the Kamata kingdom in the early part of the 16th century is an important chapter in the history of north-east India. Under their great king Naranarayan, the Koches extended their sway over almost the entire north-east. This glory was, however, short-lived. Greatly weakened by the partition of their kingdom and jealousy and conflict between the ruling houses of the divided kingdoms of Koch Behar and Kamrup (Koch Hajo), the Koches gradually dwindled into insignificance in the political arena. But the actual contribution of the Koch rule lies in the patronage it extended to the cultural development of this part of the country as well as to the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, which revolutionised the entire face of the Assamese society.

Substantially based on Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Dibrugarh University in 1983, the present publication is the result of my persistent investigation into the socio-political life of the lower Brahmaputra valley during the 16th-17th centuries. Although I have tried my best to examine critically all available materials, still the work may not be claimed to be complete in

all respects. There is enough room for new interpretations while amplifying the utilised materials. However, I hope, it might inspire sincere scholars to investigate the undiscovered history of a class of men who have been left unnoticed through the ages.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to all the authors whose works I utilised in preparing this volume. I take this opportunity to offer my thanks to the authorities and officials of the different institutions for their help and cooperation in various ways in collecting materials. I acknowledge my gratefulness to Prof. (Mrs.) S.L. Baruah of History Department, Dibrugarh University, Assam, who kindly supervised my work despite her heavy academic workload. I must also acknowledge with thanks the valuable suggestions and advice which the late Professor Dr. D.C. Sircar, who was also one of my thesis-examiners, gave me particularly during the preparation of the first chapter. It is under his instructions that this chapter has been revised for this edition. Besides, I offer my sincere regards to Prof. K. P. Baruah of DHSK College, Dibrugarh, and Dr. H. Goswami of Economics Department, Dibrugarh University for their valuable help and suggestions. Thanks are also due to Mr. K. Gogoi and Mr. G. Borah of Dibrugarh University for typing out the work. I am indebted to my friend M. M. Mazumdar, my brother G. Nath and my wife J. Gogoi (Nath) who helped me in working out the present volume.

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D. NATH

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Abbreviations

AAAW	: <i>An Account of Assam</i> by J. P. Wade.
AB	: <i>Ahom Buranji</i> .
ABGB	: <i>Assam Buranji</i> by G. R. Barua.
ABHB	: <i>Asam Buranji</i> by Harakanta Barua Sadar Amin.
ABS	: <i>Asam Buranji Sar</i> by Kasinath Tamuli Phukan.
ABSMJC	: <i>Asam Burani or Sri Sri Svarganarayandev Maharajar Janma Charitra</i> .
ADB	: <i>Annals of Delhi Badshahate</i> by S. K. Bhuyan.
AEALK	: <i>Aspects of Early Assamese Literature</i> (ed.), B.K. Kakati.
BGC	: <i>Bardowa Guru Carit</i> .
CSLSC	: <i>The Cooch Bihar State and Its Land Revenue Settlement</i> by H. N. Choudhury.
DAB	: <i>Deodhai Asam Buranji</i> .
DHAS	: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies.
DRV	: <i>Darrang Raj Vamsavali</i> .
EI	: <i>Epigraphia Indica</i> .
GCR	: <i>Guru Carit</i> by Ramcharan Thakur.
GCS	: <i>Guru Carit</i> (ed.) K. Saikia.
HAG	: <i>A History of Assam</i> by E.A. Gait.
HBM, I	: <i>History of Bengal</i> , Vol. I (ed.), R.C. Majumdar.
HBS, II	: <i>History of Bengal</i> , Vol. II (ed.) Sir J. N. Sarkar.
HCGh	: <i>A History of Cooch Behar</i> (tr.) S. C. Ghoshal.
JARS	: <i>Journal of Assam Research Society</i> .
JASB	: <i>Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal</i> .
KAS	: Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti.
KB	: <i>Kamrupar Buranji</i>
KBIKh	: <i>Koch Beharer Itihas</i> by A. Khan Chaudhury.
KGC	: <i>Katha Guru Carit</i> .
KJKC	: <i>Kirata Jana Kriti</i> by S.K. Chatterji.
KJPK	: <i>Koch Behar Jelar Pura Kriti</i> .

- KP : *Kalika Purana*.
 KRB : *Ms. Koch Rajar Buranji*.
 MNEFPB : *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*
 by S. N. Bhattacharya.
 MSB : *Mahapurusha Sankaradeva* by Bhushan Dvija.
 PAB : *Purani Asam Buranji*.
 PBPSS : *Prachin Bangala Patra Sankalan* by S. N. Sen.
 PKSID : *Prachin Kamrupiya Kayastha Samajar Itivritta* by
 H. N. Datta Baruah.
 PSN : *Prachya Sasanawali* (ed.) M. Neog.
 Riyaz : *Riyaz-us-Salatin*.
 SAB : *Satsari Asam Buranji*.
 SHTN : *Sankaradeva and His Times* by M. Neog.
 SMCD : *Mahapurusha Sri Sankaradeva Aru Sri Madhava-*
deva by Daityari Thakur.
 YT : *Yogini Tantra*.

Glossary

- Acharya*—a preceptor; a spiritual guide; an instructor, especially one who teaches the *Vedas*.
- Admaha*—a unit of currency equal to 1/8 of a rupee.
- Ahu tali*—land where *Ahu* or rabi crop is sown.
- Akhai*—parched rice.
- Amatya*—a minister.
- Ankiya-nat*—one-act devotional plays written by Vaishnava saints, particularly Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva.
- Ata*—a senior and respectable devotee residing in a *Satra*.
- Atai*—a celebrate devotee residing in a *Satra*.
- Bachari*—Assamese war-boat.
- Bandi or Beti*—a maid servant under bondage.
- Bao tali*—land where *Bao* crop is sown.
- Bargit*—devotional songs in classical tunes particularly composed by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva.
- Bargohain*—one of the three 'Great Gohains' or ministers of the Ahom government. He governed the tract from the south of the Dikhow to Kaliabar.
- Batchara*—a gate-house, a two-roofed small house in front of the *Namghar* and the *Kirtanghar* serving as a gateway.
- Bayan*—leader or member of an instrumental musical party.
- Bhakat*—a devotee.
- Bhatima*—a devotional song employed in the Vaishnava dramas.
- Bhawana*—a dramatic show based on religious themes.
- Bihu*—Assamese national festival.
- Bish*—unit of land measurement equal to 13 standard *bighas*.
- Brahmottar*—revenue free land granted to a Brahmin.
- Buragohain*—one of the three 'Great Gohains' or ministers of the Ahom administration, considered, by tradition, as the senior most. He governed the tract from the north of the Dikhow river to Sadiya.

- Buranji*—Assamese chronicle; *Buranji* is a Tai-Ahom word meaning a 'store-house of knowledge' which teaches the ignorant.
- Carit-Puthi*—a biography of a Vaishnava saint.
- Chadar* or *Cheleng*—a single cloth wrapped round the body or over the shoulders.
- Chakla*—an administrative unit consisting of several villages.
- Charyyas/Charyyapadas*—Buddhist lyrical works by the *Siddhas*, where earliest specimens of Assamese are found.
- Chatra*—royal umbrella.
- Chali-nach*—a type of *Satriya* dance resembling the spreading out of the tail of a peacock.
- Chatradhari-Raja*—a prince who used to hold the royal umbrella over the king's head at the time of coronation ceremony.
- Choki*—an out-post.
- Danda*—royal sceptre; symbol of administration.
- Dasavataranritya*—dance showing the ten incarnations of God Vishnu.
- Daphala-kunda*—a kind of wooden frame used to punish a criminal; stock for confining criminals; a red trap.
- Deodhai*—an Ahom or a Kachari priest.
- Devdasi-nritya/Nati-nach*—dev=god, dasi=slave, nritya=dance; a dance performed by temple girls before the deity.
- Dev-Dharma Rajas*—a term applied to the diarchy of Bhutan; *Dev-Raja* in charge of the general administration, *Dharma-Raja* that of religious.
- Devottar*—revenue free lands granted for the purpose of erection and maintenance of temples.
- Dharmottar*—revenue free land granted for religious purposes.
- Dola*—the Assamese litter; sedan or palanquin.
- Duars*—mountain passes.
- Ekasarana*—eka=one, sarana=initiation; the supreme surrender to one God.
- Ga-dhan*—bride-price.
- Gamocha*—an Assamese towel.
- Garamali*—a police constable of the Koch kingdom.
- Gathiyan*—a kind of fragrant root for anointing the hair, also used as medicine.
- Gayan*—the leader or member of a Vaishnava singing party.

- Ghat*—a landing place on the bank of a river.
- Ghuri*—a kind of lower garment.
- Gomasta*—an administrative officer under the Koches.
- Gram-Sabha*—village assembly.
- Gosain*—a spiritual guide; the head of a *Satra*. Initially only the Brahmin *Satradhikaras* were called *Gosains*, but subsequently all *Satradhikaras*, Brahmins or non-Brahmins, were called so.
- Got-Karai*—fried coarse rice.
- Guru*—preceptor.
- Gurucarita*—a biography of a Vaishnava saint.
- Halisa* or *Halsa*—a unit of land measurement equal to 1/4th of a *Pura*
- Hat*—a market place.
- Hali*—row of huts in a *Satra* where the devotees live.
- Hengul*—vermillion, cinnabar.
- Jaigir*—lands given by the Koch kings to the state officers as remunerations.
- Jakai*—a kind of bamboo appliance for catching fish.
- Jaklar*—tax levied on fisheries.
- Jama*—a kind of loose trousers.
- Japi*—a kind of circular sun-shade; a wicker-work.
- Kaithali/Kayasthika*—a kind of Assamese script used in western Assam in medieval times; book-keeping and accountancy.
- Kar*—tax.
- Kandali*—expert in debates specially in scriptural topics.
- Karapat*—gate way to a *Satra*, built in style of small houses.
- Kamdhenu*—a fabulous cow, said to have given anything asked for, belonging to sage Vashishtha.
- Koshas*—(see *bacharis*).
- Kataki*—an ambassador.
- Khanikar*—an artisan.
- Kharani*—a kind of alkali prepared from the ash of plantain plant, specially from the rhizoms.
- Kherai-Puja*—worship of the primordial male deity *Bathua-brai* and primordial female deity *Kamkhi* by the Bodo-Kacharis.
- Kirtana*—a devotional work by Sankaradeva; an act of chanting prayers.
- Kowri*—conch shell, used as medium of exchange, 1280 *kowris* being equal to one *rnpee*.

Krishna-nach—a kind of dance depicting the deeds of Lord Krishna.

Kuthi/Kuchi—a small area consisting of two or three villages.

Maghuwa tali—Land for the cultivation of rabi crops.

Maha—unit of currency, 1/4 of a rupee.

Maha-purushiya—another name for Sankaradeva's sect.

Manikut—a room attached to a Vaishnava prayer house where the sacred scripture or the idol of the deity is installed.

Mantra—incantations.

Mechaghar—a house with bent roofs.

Medhi—a functionary appointed by the *Satradhikara* to look after the religious affairs of a village.

Muga—a kind of Assamese silk made of cocoon (*Antheroea Assamaea*).

Muri—husked rice inflated or blown by parching.

Mohar—a gold coin weighing a *tola* (10 grams); a seal.

Namghar—Vaishnava prayer hall.

Nama-Kirtana—community singing of devotional hymns to God.

Nara-Kapor—a special kind of fine cotton cloth.

Narayani—Koch coins.

Oja-Pali—a choral performance with dance and music where Puranic tales are recited.

Pag/Paguri—head-dress of a noble.

Paik—an adult male having had to render specific services to the state.

Pandit—a scholar; a teacher; one proficient in a field.

Pat—the silk of the mulberry fed silk worm.

Payasa—rice boiled with milk and sugar.

Phat-kar—a duty levied on traders.

Phandi—a person trained in catching elephants.

Pirpal—a revenue free land granted for the maintenance of a Muslim *Pir* or a mosque.

Piyada—a constable of the Koch kingdom.

Pon—a unit consisting of 80 numbers.

Pujari—a priest; a worshipper.

Prasad—sacred offerings.

Pura—a unit of land measurement, equal to 4 *Bighas*.

Raga—one of the six primary modes of music.

Raga-lakshanas—characteristics of the *ragas*.

- Raga-malitas*—a continuous descriptive poem relating to a *raga*.
- Rajkhowa*—an administrative officer of the Ahoms.
- Rajpat*—royal seat of throne.
- Raj-sabha*—royal court.
- Rishi*—a sage.
- Rupit tali*—lands for cultivating transplanted rice.
- Sabah*—a congregation of people for religious or semi-religious purposes.
- Sanci-pat*—a sheet prepared from the sanc-tree (*Aquilaria agallocha*) used for writing the manuscripts.
- Saksal*—a kind of instrument used to punish a criminal; wooden peg.
- Saranh*—an iron instrument used in punishing a criminal.
- Samkranti*—the passage of the sun to a new sign or position; the last day of a Hindu month.
- Sastra*—religious scriptures.
- Satra*—a monastery of the Vaishnava sect.
- Satradhikara*—head of a *Satra*.
- Siddha*—one who attains superhuman power through acts of devotion.
- Sika*—pure, genuine.
- Silakuti*—an artisan who works on stone.
- Simhasana*—an ornamented seat supported on sculptured lions on which an idol is placed or a king sits; a throne.
- Sudra*—a non-Brahmin Hindu
- Sutradharinritya*—the dance of the inaugurator called *Sutradhara* or *Sutradhari* of a Vaishnava drama.
- Svargadeo*—the title of the Ahom kings. *Svarga*=heaven, *deo*=god, an Assamese equivalent to the Tai-Ahom word *Chao-Pha* (meaning the god coming from heaven).
- Taka*—rupee.
- Tanga*—a kind of horse from Bhutan.
- Than*—a sacred place; a place of worship at the cremation ground of religious man.
- Thapana*—alter, a place set up for worship, a sacred scripture place by the Vaishnavas as an object of worship.
- Tola*—a school for Sanskrit learning kept by a Brahmin scholar.
- Tola*—a measurement of weight equal to 11.66 gm.

Ujir—judicial officer of the Koches.

Vasma—race; family.

Vamsavali—a geneological table; a history of a royal or a noble family or a *Satra*.

Vidhi—rule of law based mainly on Hindu religious texts.

Yajna—a sacrifice; a ceremony in which oblations are offered.

Yuga—an age of the world.

CHAPTER I

The Koches: Their Racial Affinities and Original Homeland

The Koches are one of the aboriginal tribes of North-East India.¹ They assumed political power in the western Brahmaputra valley in the early 16th century, and for a time exercised their sovereignty over almost the major part of the North-East. They made a significant contribution towards the progress of civilization and culture of the Brahmaputra valley in particular, and of North-East India in general. Following the invasion of the Kamata kingdom which comprised the western Brahmaputra valley by Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah, the Sultan of Bengal (A.D. 1439-1510) in A.D. 1498, Bisw—later known as Biswa Singha, an adventurous Koch chief, organised the strength of his tribe. It was he who laid the foundation of his kingdom in about A.D. 1515 on the ruins of this kingdom of Kamata. His son and successor Naranarayan (A.D. 1540-1587) was not only the greatest of the Koch kings, but was also one of the illustrious rulers of North-East India of his time. His long reign of nearly half a century forms a landmark in the history of the Brahmaputra valley. With the help of his able brother Chilarai, who was also his general, he brought most of the neighbouring states under the Koch hegemony and by greatly patronising various cultural pursuits as well as the New-Vaishnavite movement, helped in the opening of a new chapter in the history of this part of the country. But the political hegemony which the Koches held over the region was short-

lived and the kingdom suffered a division in A.D. 1581 following the death of Chilarai in A.D. 1576. The western division was known as Koch Behar and the eastern division as Kamrup or Koch-Hajo. Despite this division and the political events of the subsequent period, Koch Behar continued its existence till its annexation to independent India, while, on the other hand, Koch-Hajo which preferred to play an inimical role against the great Mughals joining its hands with the Afghans, was annexed to Mughal India in A.D. 1612. However, it was occupied later by the Ahoms after the battle of Saraighat in A.D. 1669, and it continued to remain in their possession till the annexation of their kingdom by the British in A.D. 1826.

Racial Origin of the Koches

The origin of the Koches is still a subject of controversy. Although there is a general agreement to the fact that the Koches include the Meches, Kacharies, Bodos, Rajvamsis, Garos etc. there is still a difference of opinion about their racial origin. According to Risley, the Koches, unquestionably "non-Aryan and non-Hindu", were "a large Dravidian tribe of north-eastern and eastern Bengal among whom there are grounds for suspecting some admixture of Mongolian blood".² Oldham also describes them as "the most conspicuously Dravidian race in Bengal".³ Dalton has stated that the Koches were all very dark and displayed "the thick protuberant lips and maxillaries of the Negro", and therefore, he considered them as belonging to the Dravidian stock.⁴ To support his claim, he forwards the opinion of a medical officer, a resident of Koch Behar who describes the Koches of that country as having "face flat . . . eyes black and oblique; hair black and straight, in some curling; nose flat and short; cheek bones prominent; beard and whisker rather deficient; . . . colour of skin in most instances black. . .".⁵

According to another group of scholars the Koches are definitely of Mongolian stock. For example, to Hodgson, the Koches belong to the "distinctly marked type of the Mongolian family".⁶ He is supported by Waddel who also says that they do not belong to the Dravidian stock, "but are distinctly Mongoloid".⁷ Buchanon and the *Dacca Blue Book* class them with the Bodos and the Dhimals.⁸ So did Endle, who had classed

the Rabhas, the Meches, Dhimals, Koches, Dimacas, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos, Hajongs and such other tribes within the fold of the great Bodo race.⁹ According to Gait, there is no doubt that the Koches of Assam belong to the Mongolian rather than to the Dravidian stock.¹⁰ Scholars like S.K. Chatterji and D.C. Sircar hold the same view.¹¹ Anthropologists of North-East India like B.M. Das also support the Mongolian origin of the Koches.¹²

While such divergence of views is there, certain contemporary sources supply us with important information regarding the ethnic identity of the Koches. Thus Minhas-ud-din Siraj, the author of the *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, which contains an account of the first two expeditions of Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar Khalji to the kingdom of Kamrupa (ancient Assam) in the first part of the 13th century, noted that during that time this region (meaning present north and north-east Bengal and Western Assam which at that time formed a part of the kingdom of Kamrupa), were peopled by the Kunch (Koch), Mej/Meg (Mech) and the Tiharu (Tharu) tribes having Turk countenance.¹³ S.K. Chatterji in this connection rightly observes that their Mongoloid features and speech made a distinct impression upon the Turks who were also members of the same race.¹⁴ Again, Ralph Fitch who visited Koch Behar in A.D. 1585, notes: "the people have ears which be marvellous great of a span long which they draw out in length by devices when they be young".¹⁵ Gait further informs us that this practice is still common among the Garos who belong to the Mongolian group.¹⁶

In religious beliefs and rites as well as in social manners and customs similarities between the Koches and other Bodo tribes like the Rabhas were noticed by scholars like Buchanon, Martin and Risley.¹⁷ Buchanon even found that the language spoken of by the Koches resembled that of the Garos.¹⁸

Contemporary literary sources also contain references to the Koches and their Mongoloid characteristics. Thus the *Padma Purana*, referring to the Koches as *Kuvacakas* states that they had no choice of food and spoke a barbaric tongue and betrayed no sophistication in their manner.¹⁹ The *Yogini Tantra*, which was composed in Assam itself in about the 16th century, refers to the Koches as *Kuvacas* and states that they were born of a Mech woman.²⁰ The *Dharma Purana*, compiled in Assam

in the 17th century under the patronage of the Ahom king Siva Singha (1714-1744 A.D.) also states that the Koches did violence to all kinds of creatures and used to take even beef.²¹

Thus there are strong grounds to conclude that the Koches are of Mongoloid origin having their homeland in the Himalayan region, most probably in Tibet wherefrom they poured into India following probably the courses of the Teesta and the Dharla. They settled first in north Bengal and then spread gradually towards the east as well as towards the south and west, where they mixed themselves up with the Dravidians. S.K. Chatterji, on geographical basis, has divided the Bodos of north-east India into two main branches: the eastern and the western, the latter, according to him, being an extension of the former.²² It is possible that coming from the north, the great Bodo race had divided themselves into two parts: one branch gradually advanced towards south and west, and the other advanced eastward through the valley of the Brahmaputra. According to S.K. Chatterji, the western branch included the Koches of Koch Behar, Kamata and Hajo; and the eastern branch, the Kacharies and the Chutiyas.²³ But Risley who ascribes them Dravidian origin states that they had probably "occupied the valley of the Ganges at the time of the Aryan advance into Bengal. Driven forward by the incursion into the swamps and forests of North and North-Eastern Bengal, the tribe was here and there brought into contact with the Mongoloid races of the Lower Himalayas and of the Assam border, and its type may have been affected to a varying degree by intermixture with these people",²⁴ which, however, is not tenable in the context of our foregoing discussions.

From the above analysis it appears that the Koches are of Mongoloid origin having close affinities with other bodo tribes like the Meches, Rabhas, Dhimals, Hajongs and Garos. But in course of time and in some limited areas, they inter-married with the Dravidians and gave birth to a mixed Mongolo-Dravidian race but having preponderant Mongoloid characters. In the middle of the 19th century Hodgson observed that their number could not be less than 8 lacs, possibly "even a million or a million and a quarter". In Assam proper, they numbered 377,808 according to the 1891 Census.²⁵

Designation of the Koches

The Koches are designated both as *Rajvamsis* and as *Bhanga Kshatriyas*. Gait observed that in "North Bengal and Goalpara" the term 'Koch' had been "falling into disrepute; and it has to a great extent, been abandoned in favour of the appellation *Rajvansi*".²⁷ He also points out that the designation '*Rajvamsi*' originally referred to an entirely distinct community of Dravidian affinities.²⁸ According to him, the Koches, after their Hinduisation, appropriated the name of this Hinduised Dravidian community, who were most numerous in their neighbourhood.²⁹ That the Koches had adopted for them the designation *Rajvamsi* after their conversion to Hinduism,³⁰ and that too long after their leader Biswa Singha had established a strong political power to reckon with, can be largely supported. The adoption of the designation was, however, so complete that in the Census of 1881, not a single person was returned as Koch in Koch Behar; the cradle of the community itself.³¹ But it is interesting to note that neither in the Persian records, nor in the foreign accounts, nor in any of the dynastic epigraph of the time, the Koches are mentioned as *Rajvamsis*. Even the Darrang Raj Vamsavali, which is a genealogical account of the Koch royal family, and which was written in the last quarter of the 18th century, does not refer to this term. Instead, all these sources call them as Koches and/or Meches.³² It is, therefore, possible that the term *Rajvamsi* as applied to the Koches is of recent origin and therefore, the contention that this term was applied to them immediately after their Hinduisation in the time of their state-formation, as held by Gait, S.N. Bhattacharyya, and others is not well-founded. On the other hand, it is possible that when the Koches became conscious of their past ancestral glory at a later period, they began to call themselves as *Rajvamsis*—meaning "descendants of the royal kindred". This new appellation also made them feel somewhat superior to the rest of their kinsmen.

The Koches were, however, ascribed a fictitious Kshatriya origin as early as the days of Biswa Singha.³³ Soon after Biswa Singha had established himself as a sovereign ruler, the Brahmanas "sought him out. They discovered that his tribesmen were Kshatriyas who had thrown away their sacred threads

when fleeing before the wrath of Parasuram . . . while Biswu himself was declared to be the son not of the humble Hariya Mandal, but of the God Siva . . ."³⁴ Probably thenceforth the members of the ruling family introduced themselves as Kshatriyas. It, however, took long time to pass the concept of the Kshatriya origin from the ruling class to the common people. It is interesting to note that while in the Census of 1881, as Rajvamsis in Koch Behar, in the Census of 1891 the term Bhanga-Kshatriya first came to be applied to these people, and as pointed out by C.C. Sannyal, there was a great fall in the number of Rajvamsis in Jalpaiguri in that year.³⁵ It may, therefore, be safely concluded that the term Rajvamsi was only recently applied to the Koches. But their Kshatriya origin, as already stated, was evolved as early as the days of Biswa Singha, although it was only towards the close of the 19th century, that the Koches, in general, claimed as Kshatriyas or more properly Bhanga Kshatriyas, and by 1921 it was seen that almost all of them became recorded as Kshatriyas.³⁶ In the final report on the survey and settlement operation in Dinajpur in 1934 to 1940, it has been observed, "formerly they (Rajvamsis, Rajvamsi Kshatriyas that are found in large numbers in Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Koch Behar), were known as Paliyas. Officially in the census they were listed as Rajvamsi Kshatriyas. There has always been some difficulty in distinguishing them from Koches", but actually there is no distinction between the Koch, Rajvamsi and Paliyas, who "are really the three names of the same thing".³⁷ Hinduisation as it had been in case of other sub-tribes of the Koches like those of Dhimals, Hajongs, Garos etc. are still in the process. It is interesting to note that the Garos after using the plough used to introduce themselves as Hajongs and the Hajongs after giving up the practice of taking certain "unclean animals and birds" came to be known as Koches. As observed by Risley:

The adhesion (of the Koches) to Hinduism is comparatively recent (which) is shown by their own customs as regards burial, food and marriage, as well as by the existence of Dhimal, who might be defined as a non-Hinduised Koch or Rajvamsi among them and beside them.³⁸

Even in the present-day North Bengal, the term Rajvamsi does not stand for a 'Caste-Hindu', but for a Hinduised tribe and "they are quite content at the same time, for the sake of political advantages, to be classed as a 'Scheduled Caste' among the lowly in Hindu society whose past disabilities are now sought to be atoned for by giving them some special privileges".³⁹ In Assam proper, however, the term 'Koch' implies the name of a caste (rather a Hinduised tribe) "into which all converts to Hinduism from different tribes, Kachari, Garo, Hajong, Lalung, Mikir etc. are admitted on conversion".⁴⁰

Origin of the term 'Koch'

A few words regarding the origin of the term 'Koch' is felt necessary here. It has already been stated that in the *Yogini Tantra* the Koches are termed as *Kuvaca*, and in the *Padma Purana* as *Kuvacaka* who are said to have taken dirty food, and spoken a barbarian tongue.⁴¹ It is possible that because of their difference particularly in food habits and speeches the Aryan scholars used to call them as such, or sometimes as *Mleccha*. K.L. Baruah opines that *Mleccha* might be a Sanskritised form of the term *Mech*.⁴² This view is also supported by Gait and S.K. Chatterji.⁴³ That the Koches and the Meches are the members of the same family, is clear from the point that while Biswa Singha's father has been represented as the chief of the twelve Mech families, his mother has been described as the daughter of a Koch chieftain.⁴⁴

According to S. K. Chatterji, "the word *Koc* (or rather *Komc*), comes from a Middle-Indo-Aryan source from *Kawomca* written *Kamoca* which can be properly Sanskritised as *Kamboja*".⁴⁵ He further states that the Kambojas of Bengal are apparently the ancestors of the Koch people of North-Bengal.⁴⁶ This view is also supported by scholars like D. C. Sircar.⁴⁷ Thus it is reasonable to hold that the appellation Koch is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit *Kamboja* to which we have a number of references as a group of people or as a country where these people dwelt.

Original Home of the Koches

According to Buchanon Hamilton the primitive Koches who

were called *Pani-Koch* lived amidst the woods, frequently changing their abode in order to cultivate land enriched by a fallow. He appears to hold that the Koches had their original home somewhere in the northern part of Bengal towards Dalimkot.⁴⁸ This view is supported by Hodgson.⁴⁹ But this theory is not wholly correct. On the other hand, a number of scholars like H.C. Raychaudhury⁵⁰ and R.C. Majumdar⁵¹ believe that the Koches came to Bengal from north-west India (NWFP) and hold them to be identical with the Kambojas, an ancient tribe of that region. N.N. Vasu also states that the Kambojas came originally from near the Gurjara country.⁵² But recognising the fact that a Kamboja race was there in the N.W.F. Province, we are rather not in a position to hold that the Kambojas belong to that race. The Tibetan work *Pag-Sam-Zon-Zang* refers to a country called *Kan-po-tsa* in the upper and eastern Lushai Hill tracts lying in between Burma and Bengal.⁵³ Accordingly, H.C. Ray has pointed out that, "there was a Gandhara and possibly also a Kamboja as well on the north-eastern frontier of India, near the regions now known as Yunnan and Szechwan, and it is not unlikely that these conquerors of Northern Bengal (meaning the Koches) may have come from that direction".⁵⁴ R.P. Chanda has taken Tibet to mean *Kambojadesa* and according to him the 'Kamboja' people have come to Bengal from Tibet.⁵⁵ This is also supported by R.C. Majumdar according to whom Kamboja was an Indian name for Tibet.⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that the Nepalese traditions apply the term *Kambojadesa* to Tibet.⁵⁷

A traditional story still prevalent among the Garos and Rabhas of Assam, also replete with references to Tibet or the eastern sub-Himalayan region as their ancestral home.⁵⁸

Again, from what has been written in the *Brihat-Samhita*, it may be presumed that Pragjotisha (ancient Assam), Lauhitya (the Brahmaputra) and *Cina* or Kamboja are contiguous regions.⁵⁹ It is to be noted that in India during both early and late mediaeval periods *Cina* meant Tibet and *Mahacina* indicated China. Some epigraphic sources testify to the fact that horses were imported to Bengal, and as such to Pragjyotishakamarupa from the Kamboja country.⁶⁰ The *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* points out that horses in large numbers imported to Assam and Bengal from Tibet.⁶¹ The *Riyaz-us-Salat* also refers to Bhutan

and the neighbouring mountainous regions as suppliers of such horse.⁶² It is to be noted that there was a ruling race in Tibet called *Khampa* or *Kampa* or *Kamba*,⁶³ and that the Tibetan monasteries (Ucangue Country) were called as *Campas* or *Compas* etc. We may, therefore, conclude that the term 'Koch' (Sanskrit *Kamboja*, *Kuvaca* or *Kuvacaka*) had its origin in Tibet and that these groups of Indo-Mongoloid people were from that country.

Now comes the question of the date of the coming of the Kambojas or Koches to Bengal and Assam. Gait in the *Census Report of 1891* observes: "the first mention of the Koch of which I am aware is in 1198 A.D. when Bakhtiyar Khalji conquered Bengal and invaded Tibet".⁶⁴ As we have already mentioned, the historian of this invasion, Minhaj-ud-din Siraj, refers to the Koch, Mech and Tharu tribes of North Bengal of his time; and he has also recorded that one Ali Mech, a Mech chieftain, guided Bakhtiyar's army through Kamarupa.⁶⁵ Epigraphic sources also help us to ascertain the tentative date of the rise of the Kambojas to political power in this part of the country. The two C.P. inscriptions found in Irda⁶⁶ and Kalanda⁶⁷ villages of Orissa of the Kamboja king Nayapala who was the son of king Rajyapala and queen Bhagyadevi and younger brother of Narayanapala, by which the king donated lands in the Dandahuktimandala within the Vardhamanabhukti, are assigned on palaeographical grounds to the latter half of the 10th century A.D.⁶⁸ Another inscription⁶⁹ of king Kunjara-ghatavarsa,⁷⁰ the 'Kamboja lord of Gauda' (*Kambojanvayaja Gaudapati*), found in Bangarh (Dinajpur District, Bangladesh), is also palaeographically assigned to the same century.⁷¹ According to Prof. D.C. Sircar, these rulers belong to the same family (of the Kambojas),⁷² and occupied not only North Bangal (Gauda), but also the South-Western portion of the province including Vardhamanabhukti.

Besides the period indicated by the above inscriptions, there are other evidence to show that the Kamboja family rose to power in Bengal even as early as the Pratihara occupation of North Bengal under Mahendrapala (c. 885-908 A.D.) known from his own inscriptions.⁷³ This is proved by the Pachimbhag plate⁷⁴ of the fifth year (c. 930 A.D.) of king Sricandra (c. 925-

975 A.D.), according to which the army of Trailokyacandra (c. 905-925), father of Sricandra, occupied Devaparabata (at the southern end of the Mainamati hill near Comilla in present Bangladesh), the capital of Samatata had been attacked by the Kambojas just a little earlier. We have shown that the Kambojas were Tibetans; and it is to be noted that in the chronicles of Ladakh,⁷⁵ we find that the Tibetan king Khri-srong-Ide-btsan (755-97 A.D.) claims to have extended his political suzerainty over India, his son Mu-tig-btsan (804-15 A.D.) to have defeated Dharmapala, and the king Ral-pa-can (c. 817-836 A.D.) to have conquered India as far as the *Ganga-sagara* in the south. Prof. Sircar has suggested that these Tibetans were allies of Gurjara-Pratihara king Vatsaraja (c. 770-800 A.D.) and the latter's son Nagabhata II (800-33 A.D.) who dethroned Dharmapala's subordinate ally Cakrayudha from Kanauj and transferred his capital there.⁷⁶ He further points out that "If Pala kingdom was invaded jointly by the Gurjara-Pratihara and the Tibetans, the Kambojas, may have begun to settle in North Bengal about this time, and it was the same area which witnessed the rise of the Hinduised Kamboja, *Gaudapati* Kunjaraghatavarsa, shortly after the death of Mahipala I in the first quarter of the 10th Century A.D."⁷⁷ The Bhaturiya pillar inscription⁷⁸ witnesses that king Rajyapala's (of the Pala dynasty) command was obeyed among other powers, by the *Cinas* as well. Here the use of the term 'Cina', which as we have stated earlier, denotes Tibet, implies that it was during his rule that the Kamboja rulers became his subordinate. It is therefore conclusive that the Kamboja rule in North Bengal was shortlived. But the Irda, Bangarh and Kalanda C.P. inscriptions which refer to king Nayapala's gift of lands in Dandabhuktimandala within the Vardhamanabhukti, indicate that the Kamboja rulers extended power also to the south-western part of Bengal together with a part of the Balasore district of Orissa. According to Prof. D.C. Sircar, this had probably taken place during the reign of king Kunjaraghatavarsa who was a contemporary of the Pala king Rajyapala (c. 917-52 A.D.). The decline of the Bhaumakaras of Jaipur (Guhesvarapataka) had facilitated to the Kamboja occupation of the region. The two Baud plates⁷⁹ of queen

Prithvimahadevi of the Bhaumakaras which are dated in the year of 158 of the Bhaumakara era record grants of land in the Dandabhuktimandala region. This implies that the Kamboja occupation had taken place after this, i.e., after 988 A.D.

The early Kamboja rulers were either Buddhist or Hindu by religion. Rajyapala, a *paramasangata*, was a Buddhist. But his son Narayanapala was a Vaishnava (*Vasudevapada-abja-pujanirata-manasa*). Nayapala and king Kunjaraghatavarsa both were Saiva, who built Siva temple in the capital city at Priyangu. This proves that Hinduisation to a limited extent, at least of the royal house alone, began as early as the 10th century A.D. The similarity of the names of the kings and queens of the Kamboja family (e.g., Rajyapala, Narayanapala, Bhagyadevi etc.) with those of the Pala rulers of Bengal, as such, appears to prove that it was an imitation while on the way through the process of acculturation. Its also indicates the subordinate position of those Kamboja rulers to the imperial Palas of Bengal in spite of their assumption of the high sounding titles of *Maharajadadhiraja Paramesvara Paramabhattacharaka*.

From the above, it may be safely presumed that the Kambojas were but Koches who migrated to India from Tibet, settled first in the north and north-eastern Bengal and then extended towards western part of Assam. Gradually they occupied large areas as far as south and West Bengal where they came into contact with diverse racial elements including the Dravidians. For a brief period they even held political power in those regions and some of their rulers ruled with assumption of sovereign titles like *Paramesvara Paramabhattacharaka Maharajadhiraja*. But their power gradually dwindled. The invasion of the Colas under their great king Rajendracola brought about the collapse of the Kamboja rule in the south. In the north, the Pala king Rajyapala, as proved by the Bhaturiya pillar inscription, extirpated their rule from North Bengal before the middle of the 10th Century A.D. The political power now became extinguished, and the masses remained tribal until the beginning of the 16th century when they had a political and cultural renaissance under the leadership of one Biswa Singha in the Brahmaputra Valley.

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Sarva-bhakshya-rata mudha mleccha go-brahma ghatakah,
Kuvackah pare mleccha ete kutu-yonayah,
Tesam paisaciki bhasa, lokacaro ra vidyate.
 cf. N. N. Vasu, *Social History of Kamarupa*, Calcutta, 1922, p. 71.
 (These Mlecchas or barbarians are accustomed to eat everything; they are idiotic, and they kill cows and Brahmanas; these other Mleccha Kuvackas have their birth place in the hills. Their language is of pisaca (demoniac) character, and they have no (good) social usage; KJJC, p. 113).
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Dakshinata Kachari Kuvaca buli yaka,
Go mamsa bhunji punu pranira himsaka.
(In the south reside the Kacharis and Kuvacas. They take beef and do violence to all kinds of creatures.)
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CHAPTER 2

Biswa Singha: Foundation of the Koch Kingdom

The Pala supremacy in Bengal declined gradually in the later half of the 11th century A.D. and the Chandra and the Varmana rulers established themselves in east and south Bengal respectively; while the Kaivartas established their hold in north Bengal. Though the Pala king Ramapala (c. 1077-1120)¹ drove away these Kaivartas and re-established his line, it could not continue for long and the Sena kings soon came to hold political hegemony in Bengal. During this period what happened to the Kambojas is not definitely known. It is possible that, they then concentrated themselves towards the northern hill sides and founded a number of small principalities covering the range of north Bengal and western Assam.

Numismatic evidences show that a certain king bearing the name or title *Danujamardana* (the crusher of the demons) ruled in Bengal for a brief period from A.D. 1416—1418. The name of the North Bengal district of Dinajpur still preserves his name.² There is a great controversy regarding his identity and exact position in the history of Bengal. Prof. S. K. Chatterji has taken him to be a Koch Chief.³ Mahendradeva who ruled after him for a year and who also styled himself as *Danujamardana* was probably his son.⁴ It is also possible that the Khans or Khens who had established themselves at Kamarupa in the first half of the 15th century were a branch of these Indo-Mongoloids.⁵ Thus during the period beginning at least from A.D. 1200 to 1500, the Koches might have maintained their existence in this or that form with certain amount of political influence and continued to be so⁶ until Biswa Singha

firmly established their hegemony in the western Brahmaputra valley in the first quarter of the 16th century.

The original name of Biswa Singha was Bisu. His father Hariyamandal⁷ was an inhabitant of the village Chikana in the Khuntaghat region in the present Goalpara district. Hariya was the recognised head of twelve leading Koch families living in that area.⁸ With this small hereditary resource, Bisu organised the different Bodo tribes of the region under his banner and launched a career of war and conquest and made the Koches a power to be reckoned with in the contemporary history of India.

Origin of Biswa Singha

The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* records a tradition regarding the origin of Biswa Singha, which also throws interesting light as to how the non-Aryan tribes were Hinduised by the astute Brahmins. According to this tradition, king Sahasrarjuna of the Chandra dynasty, a legendary figure, once went out for a hunting excursion and spent the night in the *usrama* (hermitage) of Jamadagni, father of Parasurama. The hermit had received the king with lavish entertainments with the help of a magic cow—*Kamdhenu*. Sahasrarjuna, struck by the extraordinary power of the cow, forcibly took it away. At that time Parasurama was not in the hermitage. No sooner he learnt it than he killed Sahasrarjuna and recovered the cow. The event did not end here. Taking advantage of Parasurama's absence from home, the sons of Sahasrarjuna, one day killed Jamadagni and lifted the cow again. This had so highly enraged Parasurama that he took a vow to clear the earth of the Kshatriyas and started slaying them from one end of the earth to the other. As a result, the earth became extinct of the *Kshatriyas*, however, only twelve princes could manage their escape from the wrath of Parasurama by keeping themselves hidden in the Chikana hill. In order to conceal their identity, they married Mech maidens and remained in the guise of Mech. Of these twelve Meches,⁹ Hariyamandal was the chief, who had two wives—Hira and Jira. It is said that Lord Siva, in guise of Hariya had one day sexual intercourse with Hira, and

in due course she gave birth to Bisu. This boy after becoming king took the name Biswa Singha, meaning one who possesses all the good qualities found in the world.¹⁰

This story of divine origin ascribed to the founder of the Koch kingdom is simply a fiction evolved to connect the Koches with some mythological Aryan figures and was definitely done while they were Hinduised. Such a device not only gave them an air of superiority but also helped them to get allegiance from the subject population. The Brahmins whose number was definitely negligible and who had to depend for their living upon the royal patronage thus tried to please the ruling class by creating stories which traced their descent from Hindu gods and goddesses or mythological figures. Still then the story of Parasurama's wrath and the flight of the twelve 'Kshatriya' princes to the midst of the Meches might have some relations with the Kamboja rule in Bengal and its overthrow by the Palas and the subsequent rule of the Chandras and the Senas. It may be that as a result of its political breakdown, the Kamboja ruling clan became scattered and the princelets were taking shelter hither and thither near the northern hill sides till they joined their hands to re-establish their political authority ousting the government introduced by Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah in Kamarupa-Kamata in A.D. 1498.

An M.S. chronicle collected by Buchanon Hamilton, tells a different story about the origin of Bisu. According to it two brothers, Chandan and Madan, established a short government at Maralabas. They ruled for only eight years, and soon the rude tribes especially the Koches "who had a number of chiefs, at first independent, but who gradually united under the authority of one of themselves named Hajo",¹¹ occupied Rangpur and Kamrup. He had two daughters, Hira and Jira of whom Hira was married to Hariya, a member of an "impure tribe" called Mech. Of them was born Bisu who succeeded to the "whole power of his grand father".¹²

From the two accounts stated above, it becomes clear that Biswa Singha's father was a Mech and mother was a Koch and both the tribes were 'rude' and 'impure', hence non-Aryan or non-Hinduised. Biswa Singha united both and mobilised their strength for laying the foundation of a kingdom.

Contemporary Political Conditions in Bengal and the North-East India

It is necessary here to discuss the contemporary political conditions of Bengal and the north-east India in which Biswa Singha organised the tribal strength of the region and made his tribe a leading political power of the time. To start with, the Delhi Sultanate which established its power in northern India towards the close of the 12th century, established an extensive empire in India stretching as far south as Madurai. But no sooner the central authority grew weak than "the centrifugal forces so common in the history of India", made headway and a number of independent kingdoms propped up in its ruins.^{12a} The process began since the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-1351). Indeed Bengal, which had been frequently independent of the rulers of Delhi, broke away from them in A.D. 1331, and it was practically left alone for about two hundred years. During this period a number of dynasties flourished in Bengal, members of which led a number of expeditions towards the east to take possession of the Brahmaputra valley. When Sultan Ghiyasuddin Mahmud Shah (1533-1538), the fourth and the last of the line of Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah was ruling in Bengal, the Afghans rose to power under Sher Khan, later Sher Shah (1540-1545), who defeated and killed the Bengal Sultan in 1538. Meanwhile, the Mughals led by Babar had defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the first Battle of Panipat in A.D. 1526, and thus the Lodi power was smashed, and so was the case of the Rajput confederacy led by Rana Sangha. Babar thereby destroyed the balance of power in the area, and laid the foundation of an all-India empire.¹⁴ His son Humayun (A.D. 1530-1540, and 1545-1556) had to deal with the rapid growth of the Afghan power in the east; but was twice defeated by Sher Shah in the battles of Chaucha (1539) and Kanauj (1540). As a result, the Mughal empire of Delhi passed on to the hands of Sher Shah and Bengal became a part of the Delhi empire. However, under the weak successors of Sher Shah, Bengal again assumed independence and remained so for nearly a quarter of a century under the Sur and the Karrani Afghans till Mughal authority was established there in A.D. 1575. Thus

when Biswa Singha was making headway towards establishing his power in the western Brahmaputra valley, Bengal was ruled by the Sultanate of the Hussain Shahi dynasty—Ala-ud-din Hussin Shah (A.D. 1493-1519), Nushrat Shahi (A.D. 1519-1532), Firoz Shah (A.D. 1532-1533) and Ghiyasuddin Mahmud Shah (A.D. 1533-1538).

When these changes were going on in Bengal, in the Brahmaputra valley the kingdom of Kamarupa following the fall of the Palas towards the close of the 12th century, was parcelled out into a number of independent principalities, at war with one another. In the eastern part of the valley, the Chutiyas, another Mongoloid tribe had been ruling over the tract east of the Suvansiri and the Dichang, while in the territory between the Namdang and the Kalang, on the south of the Brahmaputra the Kacharis were ruling. West of the Chutiyas on the north bank, and of the Kacharis on the south were the domains of some petty chiefs called Bhuyans. To the extreme west was situated the contracted kingdom of Kamarupa, later known as Kamata, extending as far as the river Karatoya in the west. The eastern boundary of this kingdom, however, varied from time to time according to the position of the hostile neighbours. The period also witnessed the establishment of a completely new power, in the extreme south-east of the valley, called the Ahoms, a section of the Tai-Shans. They checked the eastern expansion of the Kamata kingdom and also successfully resisted the repeated attacks of the Turko-Afghan Sultans of Bengal and later of the Mughals. In the early part of the 16th century, when Biswa Singha was making headway with establishing his power, the rule of the Ahoms was confined to the river Namdang. However, with the accession of Suhungmung Dihingia Raja (A.D. 1497-1539) a new period of conquest and consolidation began. This king annexed the Chutiya kingdom in 1523, subjugated a number of Bhuyans on both banks of the Brahmaputra, and pushed the Kacharis beyond the Kalang, thus occupying the entire Dhansiri valley and the major part of the present district of Nowgong. Further, the local chronicles record an event of Suhungmung Dihingia Raja's successful clash with the ruler of Gaur, which we are going to discuss shortly.

Biswa Singha and the Bhuyans

Since it was mainly the Bhuyans with whom Biswa Singha had to fight to establish himself, the role of these chiefs in the political history of this period deserves to be mentioned here. The term *Bhuyan* comes from the Sanskrit word *Bhaumika*, meaning a 'landlord' which is equivalent to the Persian word *Zamindar*.¹⁵ The Bhuyans are common to both Assam and Bengal and in both countries they are usually referred to as *Bara Bhuyans*—meaning the twelve land lords, although the term *Bara* does not mean that their number should necessarily be twelve. They rose to political power taking advantage of the then political situation of their respective countries.¹⁶ In Assam, for example, there was a loss of centralised authority after the death of Sandhya (c. 1250-1270), who fought the Muslim invaders led by Ikhtiyar-ud-din Yuz-Bak Tughril Khan in A.D. 1255-56; and it appears that the Bhuyans began exercising their independent powers from about the close of the 13th century. Of course, their political status varied according to the nature of the government in the centre. If a ruler at the centre could exercise his sovereign power over the region, the Bhuyans owed him their allegiance, but they used to behave as independent lords whenever the central authority grew weak.

Some of the Bhuyans used to call themselves as kings, (*Raja*) whereas some others assumed titles like *Kshatriya Samajapati*.¹⁷ The powerful of them again distinguished themselves as *Bar* (big or great) Bhuyans reducing the petty ones to the status of *Choia* (small) Bhuyans. The *Riyaz-us-Salatin* makes mention of the Kamata chieftains or Bhuyans like Rup Narain, Mal Kunwar, Gasa Lakhan, and Lachmi Narain calling them as *Rajas*.¹⁸ In the account of Buchanon Hamilton also, there is a reference to one 'Harup Narayon' as the king of Kamata who is said to have been the son of 'Mal Kongyar' and grandson of 'Sada-Lukhymon'.¹⁹ It is possible that Buchanon mistook Harup Narayon (Narayan) as the king of Kamrup, although in reality he was only a Bhuyan. It is also possible that, soon after the return of Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah from Kamata, his son Danlyal who was appointed as governor of the conquered country, had to face a rebellion organised by the local Bhuyans, led most probably by Harup Narayon. The

Bhuyans were most certainly joined by the local tribal chiefs like Bisu. As a result of this united resistance, Daniyaland his men were killed and the Muslim government introduced in Kamata was overthrown. The Bhuyans now again began ruling the country as independent chiefs. According to K. L. Barua, this, "state of things could not naturally continue for a long time. Ultimately a leader appeared who raised his head above all the other petty chiefs and gradually subjugated them all. This was Bisu, the son of Hariya Mandal, who subsequently became king and assumed the name of Biswa Singha".²⁰

It is usually believed that the Bhuyans constituted a Hindu caste. But in the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, as well as in Persian sources like the *Akbarnama* and the *Ain-i-Akbari*, there are references to Muslim Bhuyans as well. This further confirms that the Bhuyans were a class rather than a caste of people. It appears that taking advantage of political unrest in the country, any person having large extents of land and resources, like arms, established himself as a Bhuyan. In the western Brahmaputra valley, the most influential persons who had both land and military resources were usually the Kayasthas who monopolised the high offices in the administration of ancient Assam and the Kalitas who monopolised trade and commerce. Hence the Assam Bhuyans are mostly from these two castes.

According to the Gurucaritas,²¹ the institution of *Bara Bhuyans* of Assam originated from the establishment of the seven Kayastha families by Kamesvara Durlabhnarayan (c. 1330-1350) following his treaty with *Gaudesvara* Dharma-narayan (c. 1325-1330). These seven Kayasthas,²² among whom was Chandivara, the great-great-grandfather of Sankaradeva, the propagator of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam, were subsequently joined by five other Kayastha families from Gauda²³ so that their total number increased to twelve. But this statement does not hold its own before the epigraphic evidence recorded in the *Raut-Kuchi Grant*, Saka 1251* (A.D. 1329) of Purushottama Dasa who was a very powerful Bhuyan. The grant records that a thousand swordsmen always marched before Basudeva, Purushottam's grandfather who was also the

* *Assam Bandhava*, Vol. VI, No. 5, Bhadra, 1322 B.S.; N. N. Vasu, *op. cit.*; pp. 24ff.

right hand-man of the king (Indranarayana). The grant further records that Purushottama, "on account of his great wealth was matchless. . . . By dint of the valour of his arms and heroism he had defeated the rival kings and obtained the glory of sovereignty".²⁴ This indicates that not only Purushottama Dasa, who made donation of a village in the present district of Kamrup to a Brahmin, was a leading Bhuyan, but his grand father was also a powerful landlord. From this it becomes clear that there were Bhuyans long before the immigration of the abovementioned twelve Bhuyans from Gauda in about A.D. 1330. King Biswa Singha is said to have fought against a large number of Bhuyans. But it was evidently against the indigenous Bhuyans that he had to launch his initial struggle. Because the *Gurucaritas* clearly inform us that the emigrant Bhuyans who were established by Durlabhnarayana first at Lengemaguri to protect his kingdom from the inroads of the Bhutiyas, were later shifted by him to Tembuwani in the eastern part of the present district of Nowgong. From Tembuwani these Bhuyans emigrated first to Alipukhuri and then to Bardowa.²⁵ If at all Biswa Singha fought against these immigrant Bhuyans as well, then this was definitely after he had consolidated himself in his position as an independent king.

One of the peculiar characteristics of the Bhuyans was that they "were independent of each other within their own domain but were in the habit of joining their forces whenever they were threatened by any common enemy".²⁶ This also shows that the Bhuyans formed a special class who had a common interest among themselves and for the protection of which they used to fight unitedly when the situation so demanded.

It has already been stated that Biswa Singha organised the strength of the different Bodo tribes of the region under the banner of that of his own. These tribes might have felt their lives insecure under the pressure of repeated Muslim invasions from the west and the oppression of the Bhuyans from inside the region. They also found that the Bhuyans, despite their advanced civilizations and superior military strength were only at war with one another and were making no attempts to set up a stabilised government. They were, therefore, looking for a leader amongst themselves who would best protect their interests. Bisu, who might have fought Ala-ud-din Hussain

Shah or his government in Kamrup under the leadership of the Bhuyans and had a knowledge of their (the Bhuyans') military tactics, and who combined in himself skill and organizing capacity with political shrewdness, now rose to the occasion. It would have been necessary to note here, how Biswa Singha had organised the different tribal strength. But information in this regard is greatly lacking. The *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* and certain Assamese chronicles contain reference to some tribal chiefs who were called *Hizdah Rajah* in the former sources, and *Othoro Rajas* in the latter.²⁷ They rose against the Mughal rule soon after the annexation of Koch Hajo in A.D. 1612. Most important of them were those of Dimarua, Panbari, Beltala, Rani, Moirapur, Barduar, Bholagram, Pantan Duar, Chaigaon, Bogaduar, Bangaon, Baku, Luki, Hengerabari etc.²⁸ Biswa Singha received the allegiance of these states including those of Darrang, Karaibari, Atiabari, Kamtabari and Balrampur.^{28a} The ruling families of these states till the annexation of the lower Brahmaputra valley to the British in 1826 were Koch, Mech or Garo and some of them claimed the continuity of their rule since several centuries back. From the fact that many of them maintained their separate identity till so late a period, it can be inferred that they were definitely there and were ruled by their own chiefs when Biswa Singha was rising to power. Subsequently, members of the Koch royal family entered into marriage relations with a few of them and set up their nominees as rulers.

It is difficult to locate accurately all these states and give their territorial extent or strength of population. In the context of our subject, it would be sufficient to know that they were small territories with an average strength of population numbering to about 300 persons.* Regarding their location, some light is thrown by later works like those of Buchanon Hamilton, Martin and Hunter. Depending on these works we give below their location as well as the racial identity of some of these ruling families.

To begin with, Dimarua was located to the south of the confluence of the Kalang with the Brahmaputra. Its chief was a

* W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. I, Reprint, Delhi 1975, p. 26.

Garos. Panbari was situated to the west of Dimarua. Beltala, whose chief claimed descent from the Koch royal family of Darrang, was situated a few miles south-east of Gauhati. Rani Duar, also called 'Des-Rani' was immediately to the south-west of Gauhati. Its ruler was a Garo. Barduar was to the south-west of Gauhati near the Garo hills. Its chief was a Garo. Mairapur was situated to the east of Barduar. Bholagram was to the east of Mairapur and its ruler was a Mech. Lukiduar was situated to the west of Gauhati and contiguous to the Garo hills. Its ruler was a Garo. Pantan Duar was adjacent to the Lukiduar on the west and its ruler was a relative of that of Lukiduar. Bogaduar whose chief was also a Garo was situated to the south of Pantan Duar. Bangaon was contiguous to Lukiduar on the west, towards the frontier of Bengal and its ruler was of the same family as that of Lukiduar.²⁹

Seeking the allegiance or support of these tribal states, Biswa Singha first entered into contest with the neighbouring Bhuyans. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* gives a list of the Bhuyans subjugated by him. But the reference is very vague so that the Bhuyans are introduced either by their caste, names or by the area under their control. For example, there is reference to a *Bar Bhuyan* of the Brahmin caste, a *Chota Bhuyan* of the same caste and another *Chota Bhuyan* of the Daivajna caste, but nothing is known about the territories under their control. The names of the Bhuyans of Jhargaon, Kusumpur, Phulaguri and Bijni are not given. Again, the identity of Dighala Bhuyan, Kalia Bhuyan and Kabilash Bhuyan can not be definitely known. However there is one Pratap Ray Bhuyan whose territory is specifically mentioned as in Gauhati at Pandunath.³⁰ The source under reference, however, supplies us with the order of their subjugation. Thus it is stated that Biswa Singha first subjugated the *Bar Bhuyan* then the *Saru Bhuyan* and then the Bhuyan of Ouguri. After this he defeated the *Daivajna Chuti Bhuyan*, and thereafter Kusum Bhuyan, Dighala Bhuyan, Kalia Bhuyan, the Bhuyan of Jhargaon, Kabilash Bhuyan, the Bhuyans of Karnapur, Phulaguri and Bejini in order of succession and finally Pratap Ray Bhuyan of Pandunath.³¹ The *Gurucaritas*³² refer to the discomfitures of Gandharva Ray, the Bhuyan of Banduka, Sriram Khan of Sajalagram, who ruled on

the south of the Brahmaputra and of Pratap Ray Bhuyan, who was probably identical with the one mentioned in the Koch chronicle, and hence was ruling at Pandunath.

The *Vamsavali* states that Biswa Singha had a hard fight with the Bhuyan of Karnapur and in course of the encounter, a large number of arms and ammunitions including horses, elephants and camels had been lost to him.³³ He then worshipped the goddess *Mecini* and according to her advice, attacked the Karnapur Bhuyan on the occasion of *Bihu* when the followers of the Bhuyan left for homes³⁴ and Pratap Ray, the Bhuyan of Pandunath, who was his ally left with his kinsmen to the Ahom territory.³⁵ M. Neog on the basis of a story of the *Gurucaritas*, however, identifies the Jhargaon Bhuyan who was defeated by Biswa Singha as one Madhuchandra, and the Karnapur Bhuyan as a descendant of Budha Khan, another contemporary of Chandivara, and conjectures that Kalia Bhuyan was possibly Kalikanatha, grand son of Budha Khan.³⁶ Wade in his account,³⁷ mentions one 'Khoroo Buinia' (Saru Bhuyan) and a 'Narain Buinia' (Narayan Bhuyan) as fighting with and meeting deaths at the hands of Biswa Singha. The account further states that 'Khoroo Buinia', 'King of Upper Assam' challenged the authority of Biswa Singha's annexation of territories, and the latter answered with a fight in which the 'Buinia' (Bhuyan) along with his men succumbed to death. As a result, Biswa Singha is said to have got a large number of arms and ammunitions.³⁸ Seeing this, another Narain Buinia (Bhuyan) despatched a messenger with the following words:

Biswa, who were till recently a cowherd, who made you Biswa Singha (*i.e.*, king)? If you do value your safety, attend me in person without delay.³⁹

But owing to the betrayal of his nobles, he "fell an easy sacrifice" to Biswa Singha who "seized the fortress and slew the king".⁴⁰ A large booty fell into the hands of Biswa Singha and all "the Buinias who remained, joined his standard".⁴¹ This was in 1455 *Saka* (A.D. 1533). The above account shows that the Bhuyans who had earlier fought the Muslims along

with Biswa Singha, later stood as a stumbling block on his way to power. Biswa Singha, therefore, had to fight the Bhuyans, who could not tolerate the rise of a tribal chief. With his superior intelligence and organised military strength Biswa Singha subjugated the Bhuyans of the region one after another; some of whom had owed him allegiance of their own accord. Thus the Bhuyans who could overthrow the Muslim rule in Kamarupa, had met with a crushing defeat at the hands of this new warrior of humble origin.

Thus establishing his sovereign power over all petty rulers of the region, Biswa Singha declared himself king. Meanwhile, he had come under Hindu influence and on the day of his formal accession to the throne, Bisu assumed the Hindu name Biswa Singha. He then appointed his brother Sisu, now known as Sisya Singha as his Chief Minister (*Rajkot*). His kingdom extended up to the Karatoya in the west and the Barnadi in the east. He made his capital at Kamatapur (or Kantanagar),⁴² four miles south-east of the present town of Koch Behar.

Biswa Singha's Marriage Relations

It is recorded in the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* that Biswa Singha married eighteen wives from different countries like those of Gaur, Kashmir and Nepal. The selection of the kingdoms was made in consultation with the ministers.⁴³ Thus he married Ratnakanti from Nepal from whom his eldest son Nara Singha was born. From Gaur, he had two wives, Hemaprabha and Padmawati, the mothers of Naranarayan and Chilarai respectively. Chandrakanti, Purnakanti, Hemakanti and Rati were from Kamarupa itself. Chandrakanti's son Gosain Kamal became later the governor of the Koch conquered tracts in Kachar. In Koch Behar and Assam there are still the remains of a road named *Gosain Kamal Ali* which was constructed under his supervision. Biswa Singha's beautiful wife Tilottama was from Kashmir. Chandra, Chandranana, Joya, Bijaya and Jayanti were from Kashi (Benaras) proper, whereas from Sonitpur were Lalita, Labanyamayee and Padmanana. Besides, he married Satarupa and Kanchanmalini who were from Mithila.⁴⁴

He had altogether eighteen sons (born of his eighteen wives); names of four of them have already been mentioned. An Assamese chronicle⁴⁵ makes reference to three other sons of Biswa Singha, namely Ramachandra (born of Hemakanti), Dip Singha (born of Jayanti) and Hemadhar (born of Lalita). The *Vamsavali* has mentioned the names of other sons also. Thus we get the names of Maydan (born of Purnakanti), Sura Singha (born of Rati), Man Singha (born of Tilottama) and Mecha (of Chandra), Brisaketu (of Chandranana), Ramnarayan (of Jaya), Ananta (of Bijaya), Meghanarayan (of Labanyamayee), Jagat (of Padmanana), Rupchand (of Satarupa) and Surya (of Kanchanmalini).⁴⁶

Date of Biswa Singha

There are difference of opinions as to the exact date of Biswa Singha's assumption of power. Whereas some scholars place him in A.D. 1515-1540, others place him in A.D. 1509-1555. Buchanon says that the Bihar (Koch Behar) *Rajas* reckon by the era of their ancestor Biswa whom they suppose began to govern in the Bengal year 916 (A.D. 1509).⁴⁷ Prashiddha Narayan's *Vamsavali* assigns A.D. 1534 as the date of the death of Biswa Singha.⁴⁸ On the basis of these two works some scholars place Biswa Singha between A.D. 1509-1534. But as the earliest known coins of Naranarayan are dated *Saka* 1487 (A.D. 1555), some scholars place Naranarayan's accession in that year and accordingly assign the period A.D. 1530-1555 to Biswa Singha.

But neither of the dates appears tenable. In the *Ahom Buranji*⁴⁹ it is mentioned that Biswa Singha made a treaty with the Ahom king Suhungmung Dihingia Raja (A.D. 1497-1539) in A.D. 1537. In an Assam *Buranji* entitled *Sri Sri Svarganarayande Maharaajar Janmacarita*, it is stated that in the *Saka* year 1465 (A.D. 1543), Ram Singha, Dip Singha and Hemadhar, the three brothers of Naranarayan were at Sala with three thousand men after taking their bath at the Bhramarakunda.⁵⁰ The term 'brothers of Naranarayan' indicates that by that time Naranarayan was the king, otherwise the author of the above *Buranji* would have referred to them as 'sons of Biswa Singha'. That Biswa Singha's reign ended before A.D. 1546,

is also evident from an incident narrated in the *Katha Guru Carit*.⁵¹ It is stated in this work that during his second pilgrimage in about A.D. 1549, Sankaradeva happened to find, one day, a deer caught hold of by a hunter. Sankaradeva is said to have requested the hunter to set the animal free from his clutch and paid him a *Narayani* half-rupee.⁵² Though no coins of Naranarayan earlier than A.D. 1555 have yet been available, the statement in the above work is not altogether baseless. On the basis of the above statement we are inclined to accept that Biswa Singha must have ruled up to A.D. 1537 or a few years later than that, and Naranarayan ascended the throne definitely before A.D. 1543.

In the records of the later Koch kings we get the use of an era dating from A.D. 1509/1510.⁵³ Buchanon opines that it was the date of the beginning of the reign of Biswa Singha.⁵⁴ According to Dr. S.N. Sen, 1510 is the date of accession of Chandan whom Biswa Singha succeeded.⁵⁵ But according to our arrangement of chronology, as shown below, it is neither the date of accession of Chandan or Madan nor the date of the accession of Biswa Singha, but a commemoration date of the latter's inheritance to "his grandfather's property".

Previously we have stated that a number of feudatory chiefs ruled in Kamata after the overthrow of the government introduced by Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah in A.D. 1498. Allowing a period of five years for Hussain Shah's rule and another seven years for Chandan and Madan or such ruling chiefs, Biswa Singha had no time to begin his career of conquest before A.D. 1510 at the earliest. It is, therefore, possible that Biswa Singha was a young man at the time of the fall of the Kamata kingdom.⁵⁶ The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* states that he ruled for a period of twenty-five years.⁵⁷ This is most possible when we take into consideration his eventful career. It appears that he lived for a few years after his Assam campaign in A.D. 1537. The Koch invasion of the Ahom kingdom in A.D. 1546-47 is clearly ascribed to Biswa Singha's son Naranarayan so that Biswa Singha's career ended definitely before this date. We can, therefore, reasonably place the reign of Biswa Singha as sovereign monarch in A.D. 1515-1540, and accept A.D. 1509 as the date when he became a

landlord and received allegiance from both the Koches and the Meches as their common chief. It was also possibly from this date that he had started his military expeditions.

Administrative Arrangements

Biswa Singha now turned his attention towards consolidation of his conquests. He, therefore, took to his hands certain administrative arrangements. First of all he appointed his brother Sisu, now named as Sisya Singha as the *Yuvaraj*⁵⁸ (the Crown Prince) who was to look after the defence of the country. This is also clear from the fact that he was also called *Raikot* or 'the Chief of the Fortres's, who in this capacity "tended in practice the chief minister of the *raj*".⁵⁹ The *Raikot* was also known as *Chatradhari Raja* because he used to hold the royal umbrella over the king at the time of his coronation.⁶⁰ But the actual implication is that he held powers next to the king. Biswa Singha then appointed a council of twelve ministers called *Karjis* and recruited them from among the twelve important families of his tribesmen,⁶¹ who had assisted him in putting an end to the period of confusion and misrule. The *Karjis* were also to serve as commanders of the army when required.⁶² Further, Biswa Singha appears to have formed a cabinet, which included, the *Raikot* and two other important and most trustworthy *Karjis*.⁶³ According to the *Vamsavali*, the members of the cabinet were called *Mantrins*. Besides this elaborate arrangement, Biswa Singha had created the office of the *Senapati* (Commander) with a separate department under him for the maintenance of the army.⁶⁴ This indicates that he had to maintain a regular army, obviously in the capital, and its strength was small.

For military and revenue purposes, it became essential for Biswa Singha to make an estimate of the population of his kingdom. He, therefore, undertook a census. The result reveals that the number of able-bodied men capable of bearing arms was, 52,25,000.⁶⁵ The figure, however, appears to be an exaggerated one because this would bring the total strength of the population to at least four times greater than that number, holding that each able-bodied man had an average of four members in his family. It may be noted in this connection

that the strength of the population in entire India in the early part of the 16th century has been estimated at 1,250,00,000 only.⁶⁶ The strength of the neighbouring Ahom kingdom at the height of its power in the first part of the 18th century was not more than 25 lakhs.⁶⁷ Although the western Brahmaputra valley was comparatively much thicker than the eastern, its fighting strength, at the period when Biswa Singha ruled with his territory limited between the Karatoya and the Barnadi, could not come up to such a high figure. The author of the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* perhaps had in his mind the total strength of population in Biswa Singha's kingdom when he put it as the total fighting strength.

Be that as it may, after the completion of the census, Biswa Singha organised his administration on military lines creating a gradation of officers in the pattern of administration then prevalent in Bengal. An able-bodied male was termed as *Paik*. Twenty *Paiks* were placed under the control of a *Thakuria*, and a *Saikia* controlled one hundred such *Paiks*. There was a *Hazari* over one thousand *Paiks*, one *Omra* over three thousand and a *Nawab* over sixty-six thousand.⁶⁸ These officers were paid in terms of land. The institution of Bhuyans was allowed to continue; a Bhuyan governed his area under the control of the king and paid him a fixed revenue.

Biswa Singha built up a fullfledged home department which had officers like those of *Raja Purohita* (Royal Priest), *Daivajna* (Astrologer), *Vaidya* (Royal Physician), *Tamuli* (Betel-nut supplier), *Supkar* (In-charge of the royal kitchen), *Bhandari* (Store keeper-cum-Treasurer), *Majumdar* (Secretary to the king), *Dvari* (Gate Keeper) and also a group of *Char* or *Dut* (Spies).⁶⁹

Biswa Singha also appointed his sons to different branches of administration.⁷⁰ While directing his eldest son Nara Singha to rule over 'foreign lands' (i.e., the conquered tract in Bhutan), he nominated his second and third sons Malladev and Sukladhvaj to succeed him to the throne and to become the *Yuvaraja* respectively and each of the other sons was put to separate duties. Thus Gosain Kamal was to look after the department of roads and communications, Ram Chandra to be in charge of the treasury, Maydan to administer the affairs of construction of bridges and Mecha was to look after the production of cannons and guns. Surya Singha and Brishaketu were appointed to look

after the goldsmiths and the blacksmiths respectively. Organisation of musical performances and celebration of festivals were placed under Ramnarayan and Hari Singha respectively. Oilmen, *Tantis* (weavers) and *Jolas* (makers of cotton thread) were to be looked after by Ananta and Meghnarayan, while Hemadhar was to conduct the affairs of priests and Brahmins, and Dip Singha was to take charge of the animals like elephants, horses, cows and buffaloes. Biswa Singha gave proper attention to matters relating to promotion and extension of agriculture, trade and commerce and maintenance of temples and other religious institutions. He appointed Rup Chand, Suryabar and Jagat to look after these matters respectively.* Each of the sons other than those who were to become rulers or *Yuvaraja*, was given a village containing one hundred and twenty families for his exclusive subsistence. These villages were formed into distinct district called *Konwarbhag*.⁷¹ Biswa Singha also asked all his sons to serve the poor, the sages and the mendicants. This was how the far-sighted king gave a new orientation to administrative discipline and at the same time encouraged the development of arts, crafts and trade.

The administrative arrangements of Biswa Singha reveal certain qualities of the king. The appointment of Sisu, his brother, as the *Yuvaraja*, who was next to the king in power and prestige, was an act of great prudence, as it not only kept his brother satisfied but also enabled him (Biswa Singha) to get his full help and cooperation in all the affairs of the kingdom. The same policy was also adopted by Naranarayan who not only appointed his brother Chilarai as *Yuvaraja* but also

* DRV (vv. 255-264) and AAW (pp. 193f) narrate how Biswa Singha distributed the assignments to his sons by playing a strategic game. He made eighteen packets containing eighteen different articles and asked the sons to pick up one each, without making it known to them what the packets contained. Thus Nara Singha picked up the packet containing gold, which symbolised riches, so he was appointed ruler of 'foreign lands', namely the conquered tract in Bhutan. Malladeva picked up the packet containing earth which symbolised the throne, so he was appointed as the successor. Sukladvaja picked up the packet, containing iron, which symbolised arms, so he was appointed *Yuvaraja* holding the office of Prime Minister and Commander to Malladev and so on.

bestowed on him almost all the important state businesses. The foresightedness of the founder king is also seen in his manner of forming the council of the ministers. All the twelve *Karjis* were the headmen of the twelve chief families who rendered help to Biswa Singha to establish the hegemony of the Koches. It is also interesting to note that despite Biswa Singha's acceptance of Hinduism, he did not appoint the Brahmins as his ministers. It appears that only the *Raj Puruhita* whose duty was purely religious, was a Brahmin and the *Daivajna* was a Ganak or a Kayastha. Thus the administration was controlled mainly by the tribal people and thereby he secured full support and cooperation from his officers in consolidating his position in the region.

Biswa Singha's Relations with the Ahoms

When Biswa Singha laid the foundation of his kingdom in the northern region of the lower Brahmaputra valley, the Ahoms had almost consolidated their power in the upper Brahmaputra valley. Their powerful king Suhungmung Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) extended the boundary of their kingdom from Sadiya in the east to the Kalang in the west and was looking farther in that direction. On the other hand, the contemporary Muslim rulers of Bengal sent a number of expeditions with a view to extending their arms to the Brahmaputra valley.

According to the *Buranjis*⁷² Suhungmung sent an army in A.D. 1533 in aid of the fugitive Kamata king in order to restore him to the throne. The commander of this army was one Chankham or Thankham Bargohain. After establishing the fugitive Kamata king in his possessions, the Ahom army proceeded as far as the Karatoya where Chankham is said to have erected a temple and excavated a tank.⁷³ The Ahom commander also established friendship with the Padshah of Gaur by sending an envoy and obtaining for the Ahom king the daughter of the Padshah with five eastern Parganas of Ghoraghat, Potladoh, Eghara Sendur, Faridabad, and Serpur as dowries.⁷⁴

On his way back to Assam, Chankham is said to have intended to attack Biswa Singha anticipating which the latter made his submission by offering presents,⁷⁵ and acknowledging

the suzerainty of the Ahom king. In recognition of his submission, Chankham Bargohain gave him all the territories west of the Sonkosh received from the Padshah of Gaur, and asked him to pay annual tributes to the Ahom king from whom he would receive all kinds of help and protection against any possible foreign invasion.⁷⁶

But the statement of the *Buranjis* is somewhat confusing. Because in A.D. 1533, there was no existence of the Kamata kingdom and it was, in fact, on its ruins that Biswa Singha had established the Koch kingdom in about A.D. 1515. The expedition as narrated in the *Buranjis*, most probably refers to the one against Turbak who invaded the kingdom of Assam in A.D. 1532-33. It was in that occasion that the Ahom army completely defeated the Muslims and pursued them as far as the Karatoya under the command of Chankham Bargohain.

The second phase of Biswa Singha's relations with the Ahoms began about five years after this event. According to the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* Biswa Singha proceeded to invade the Ahom kingdom, and reached as far as the Singri hill; but owing to the shortage of food supply, he had to retreat.⁷⁷ But the *Ahom Buranji* states that Biswa Singha paid a friendly visit to the court of Suhungmung in A.D. 1537 and offered to make his submission promising to pay an annual tribute consisting of horses and other valuable articles. On this occasion he is said to have made the following statement:

We your slaves, pray your majesty to help us in time of difficulty. If you assist us when we are pressed hard, we your slaves, promise to pay you annual tributes.⁷⁸

The Ahom king was pleased with Biswa Singha and offered him a number of presents including cows and buffaloes.

Although the above mentioned Koch and Ahom chronicles are contradictory to each other, it is not difficult to trace out the actual course of events. Biswa Singha, in order to make himself independent of the Ahoms, led a campaign in A.D. 1537. But failing to secure any success because of shortage of provisions as has already been stated, prudently paid a personal visit to the Ahom king at his capital and offered tributes.

However, Biswa Singha, an ambitious king could not remain

satisfied with his position as a vassal to the Ahom *Svargadeo*. But because of the frequent inroads of the Muslim invaders to the Brahmaputra valley during the period and their defeat and innihilation at the hands of the powerful Ahom king Dihingia Raja, Biswa Singha did not dare to shake off the Ahom vassallage. According to the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* and some Assamese chronicles, Biswa Singha asked his sons at his death bed to remove the slur of having remained a vassal to the Ahoms.⁷⁹ Therefore, there is no denying the fact that Biswa Singha was a vassal to the Ahom king.

Biswa Singha's Relations with the Bengal Sultans

As stated earlier Biswa Singha's rise to power was facilitated by the confusion created by the Bhuyans following the overthrow of Daniyal who was appointed as the governor of the kingdom of Komata, when its ruler Nilambar (c 1493-1498) was overthrown by Daniyal's father Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah in A.D. 1498. We have also stated that Biswa Singha might have fought the Muslims along with the Bhuyans to overthrow Daniyal.

The chronology of the rulers of Bengal shows that Biswa Singha's contemporary rulers were Nurshrat Shah (A.D. 1519-1532), Firoz Shah (A.D. 1532-1533) and his successor Mahmud Shah (A.D. 1533-1538). Of them, Nushrat Shah undertook a series of campaigns against Assam under his able commanders like Turbak to whom we have already made a reference. Even after the death of this ruler, some Muslim generals continued such campaigns.⁸⁰

The *Deodhai Asam Buranji* recording the first of these invasions against the Ahom kingdom in A.D. 1527, furnishes us with the names of Muslim generals like *Bar Ujir*, Mit Manik or Bit Manik and Lupt.⁸¹ S.N. Bhattacharyya, on the basis of an inscription,⁸² has identified this *Bar Ujir* with Ruknu-ud-din Rukn Khan, who was previously one of the generals of Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah during his campaign against the Kamata kingdom of A.D. 1498. It may be noted here that the *Buranjis* have not recorded anything about what the Muslims had done to Biswa Singha whose territory they might have crossed over in course of their march against Assam. It is possible that they

first attacked Biswa Singha whom they held responsible for the overthrow of Daniyal in alliance with the Bhuyans. As a result the founder Koch king became a fugitive and sought shelter among his tribesmen in the hilly regions.⁸³ The Muslim forces then advanced farther east and attacked the Ahom kingdom and reached as far as the Buroi river.⁸⁴ Thus, as pointed out by S.N. Bhattacharyya, the Muslim invasions of Kamrup and Assam were successive in order, the latter being the contollary of the first.⁸⁵

From the above, it becomes clear that, for fear of any possible attack from the Muslim rulers of Bengal, Biswa Singha accepted the vassalage of the neighbouring Ahom king. The latter also finding a faithful ally in the person of Biswa Singha against the imminent danger from the powerful Muslim invaders allowed Biswa Singha to enjoy his autonomy. The Ahom king thereby created a strong buffer state in between his own and the Muslim territories of Bengal. Thus, "hard pressed by the Koches and the Assames, the Muhammadans soon packed up baggage and evacuated the north-eastern frontier region altogether".⁸⁶

Extent of the Kingdom: Transfer of Capital

Biswa Singha inherited a small possession "bounded in the west by the Sonkosh, on the north by Dhavalagiri (Himalayas) and on the South by the Lohita (Brahmaputra)".⁸⁷ He started his career by establishing his headquarters at the hilly region at Chikana (or Chikina), the ruins of which are still in extant between the rivers Saralbhanga and Champawati, fifty to sixty miles to the north of Dhubri.⁸⁸ By subjugating the Bhuyans on both banks of the Brahmaputra, Biswa Singha extended his territory to the Barnadi on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in the east and the Karatoya in the west. On the south bank it extended as far as the river Kapili in the present Nowgong district. His dominion comprised the lower Himalayan region, the whole of the present districts of Kamrup, Goalpara and a part of Nowgong, as well as the district of Rangpur except Ghoraghat in present Bangladesh.

After his subjugation of the Bhuyans, Biswa Singha transferred his capital from Chikana to Kamatapur (Kantanagr),⁸⁹

later known as Koch Behar four miles to the south-east of the present town of Koch Behar.⁹⁰ According to the *Rajopakhyana* the transfer was made at the suggestion of Biswa Singha's mother who intended to have a fine city in the plains.⁹¹ In any case the decision was a well-thought one, because Kamatapur the capital of the erstwhile kingdom of Kamrup-Kamata commanded a strategic importance and was safe from the recurring inroads of the Bhutiyas. This city was also comparatively more safe against any outside aggression.

The city of Kamatapur was highly praised of its beauty and splendour not only by the contemporary poets and writers but also by those of the earlier period. It also continued to remain the capital of the successors of Biswa Singha.

Biswa Singha's Relations with Bhutan

The country of Bhutan, called as such after the Bhutiyas, a tribe living there, stretches over the sub-Himalayan region from the Teesta river in the west to the river Panchnoi in the east. It roughly covers a range of 240 miles from the east to west with an average width of 40 to 50 miles.⁹² It had an organised government and had been ruled by a diarchy consisting of a *Dharma Raja* with supreme political and religious powers and a *Dev Raja* in-charge of general administration of the country.⁹³ They were together known as *Dev Dharma Rajas*.

The *Rajopakhyana* states that Biswa Singha attacked Bhutan and defeating its ruler compelled him to pay tribute.⁹⁴ G.R. Baruah does not mention any war between Biswa Singha and Bhutan but states that the Bhutiyas were creating troubles on border, and in order to bring these rebels into control, Biswa Singha concluded a peace treaty with *Dev Dharma Rajas*.⁹⁵ In the *Rajopakhyana* Biswa Singha is said to have imposed upon the Bhutiya Raja the following provisions:

You must always be the subject of the reigning king of Kamatapur. On account of the anarchy that had hitherto prevailed in the kingdom, you have ruled as independent chief. Now by the grace of *Bhagawati*, I have become king of Kamarupa. You will, therefore, acknowledge submission and pay the tribute, or be prepared for war.⁹⁶

The Bhutiyas continued to be a menacing factor to Koch Behar till the occupation of the country by the British.⁹⁷ It is therefore, not improbable that such a treaty relation was concluded between them. Bhutan was thus made a tributary and Biswa Singha exercised considerable influence over Bhutan and the foothills region was brought under his direct rule. Since then the Bhutiyas who had traded with the plains, had to pay tributes to the Koch kings.⁹⁸ It has already been stated that Biswa Singha appointed his eldest son Nara Singha as the ruler of Bhutan. There are remains of a fort called *Biswa Singhar Killah* (named after Biswa Singha) about ten to twelve miles away from Chikanagram.⁹⁹ It is to be noted that it was as a result of this relation that the Bhutiyas had offered to join the Koch forces, when Naranarayan and Chilarai marched against the Ahom kingdom in 1562-63.¹⁰⁰ Biswa Singha's Bhutan policy gave him not only material gain, but it also helped him in enhancing his military strength.

Biswa Singha's Relations with the Morung Country

The name *Morung* stands for the Tarai region west of the Mechi river.¹⁰¹ It also covers the submontane tract west of Koch Behar.¹⁰² During the period under reference it was ruled by a king who was most probably, and at least racially, related to the Koches.¹⁰³ It would be discussed shortly that Biswa Singha's eldest son Nara Singha who usurped the throne in the absence of Naranarayan, the legal claimant to the throne, had fled to this country seeking asylum there after he was overthrown by the latter. But the king of the Morung country refused him shelter and instead entered into a treaty relation with Naranarayan by offering him tributes.¹⁰⁴ It therefore, appears that amicable relations existed between Biswa Singha and the ruler of Morung. It is also not unlikely that the Morung country was a protectorate of the Koches; and it was due to this relation that its ruler refused asylum to Nara Singha.

Biswa Singha's matrimonial relations with other countries of Northern India, as has been seen, were no doubt prompted by diplomatic considerations. These alliances, on the one hand, enhanced the glory and fame of the rising Koch kingdom and

on the other, encouraged trade and cultural relations with them. He had imported a number of Brahmins from Gaur and Mithila and thereby strengthened the cultural relations with these countries. It was on the basis of such friendly relations that his grandson Lakshminarayan built a Siva temple at Benaras in about A.D. 1612.¹⁰⁵ It is also not impossible that his friendly relations through matrimonial ties dissuaded the rulers of the neighbouring countries from helping or undertaking any aggression against the nascent Koch power of the Brahmaputra valley.

Biswa Singha's Patronage of Religion and Literature

After this conversion Biswa Singha actively patronised Hinduism and encouraged the worship of both Siva and Durga. Siva was sometimes invoked as *Banesware*, and Durga as *Kamateswari*. But the most popular form of the goddess was Kamakhya and she was worshipped even with human sacrifice. It is evident from the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* that he discovered the ruins of the Kamakhya temple lying embosomed in jungle,¹⁰⁶ in the Nilachala hill. While undertaking the project of rebuilding the temple, he issued orders to place a *rati* of gold in each piece of brick used in the construction.¹⁰⁷ The chronicles are silent regarding the details of the construction. Thereafter he rebuilt the temple of Bhavani (Kamateswari) at Gosanimari within the present district of Koch Behar.¹⁰⁸ As pointed out earlier, Biswa Singha then brought to his kingdom a number of Brahmins from Mithila and Gaur to conduct the religious rites of these temples. The local chronicles make reference of one Kali Chandra Bhattacharyya of Gaur who encouraged the worship of Siva and of one Vasudeva Acharyya who was appointed the chief priest of the Kamakhya temple.¹⁰⁹ Biswa Singha patronised the worship of Vishnu as well and gave gifts to Vaishnava priests and astrologers.¹¹⁰ He took measures for the defence of the kingdom. It is said that he constructed an earthen wall on the southern border of his kingdom running from the Karatoya to the Brahmaputra the remains of which are still extant.¹¹¹ As stated earlier, he is also credited with the building of a fort called *Biswa Singhar Killah* in the Bhutan

border at a distance of about ten to twelve miles from Chikanagram.¹¹²

Biswa Singha was interested in literary activities. His court at Kamatapur was adorned by poets, preceptors and scholars. Sakta poets like Mankar and Durgavar who are best known for their *Mangal-Kavyas* were his court poets.¹¹³ There are reasons to believe that the *Yogini Tantra*, an early 16th century work, dealing with the *Devi* worship, was written under his patronage. Kavi Pitambar, the author of the *Nal-Damayanti Kahini* was also at his court. Biswa Singha's pursuit for higher education is well evidenced by the fact that he sent his sons Malladev and Sukladhvaj to Benaras to have their education there under one Brahmananda Sanyasi.¹¹⁴ This pursuit of the founder Koch king for education and literature reached its full bloom in the days of his learned son Naranarayan.

To conclude, Biswa Singha was an ambitious chief with keen political foresightedness and rare organising ability. He first organised the Koches and the Meches under his banner carved out a kingdom on the ruins of that of Kamarupa-Kamata. He united the distracted Bhuyans and other tribal chiefs scattered in the lower Brahmaputra valley under the hegemony of the Koches and made them a power strong enough to play soon an important role in the political and cultural history of the north-east India. He consolidated his territories and introduced an efficient administrative machinery. He encouraged the promotion of agriculture and trade as well as education and learning and by all this, he laid the foundation for the greatness of his son and successor Malladev alias Naranarayan. S. N. Bhattacharyya rightly compares him with Babar, the founder of the Mughal empire in the following words:

Like his Mughal contemporary Babar, he was a born leader, but unlike him, he combined in himself great military talents with unrivalled genius for administrative organisation.¹¹⁵

REFERENCES

1. HBM, I, p. 177.
2. KJKC, p. 116.

3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
6. G.R. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, Gauhati, 1972, pp. 39f. (henceforth abbreviated as ABGB).
7. He is also called 'Hari' or 'Hathiya', ABGB, p. 39; S. K. Bhuyan, (ed), *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, Gauhati, 1962, p. 37, (henceforth, DAB) refers to him as 'Sandia Maral'. It is possible that he was a *Maral* meaning the head or leader of a group or guild of weavers (*Tantis*), rather than a *Mandal*, who was a petty revenue officer. People with this title are still found in western Assam.
8. They were Panbar, Phedela, Phedphedo, Barihana, Kathiya, Guabar, Megha, Baisagu, Jugai, Gurikata, Jugabar and Dakharu. See DRV, v. 51.
9. See *Supra*, fn. 8.
10. DRV, v. 144; S. K. Bhuyan (ed), *Kamrupar Buranji*, Gauhati, 1958, p. 10, (henceforth KB).
11. KB, Appendix C, pp. 126f.
12. *Ibid*, p. 127.
13. R. C. Majumdar, *et. al.*, *An Advanced History of India*, Delhi, 1970, p. 335.
14. Satish Chandra, *Medieval India*, Part, II, New Delhi, 1982, p. 130.
15. J. Wise, 'On the Barah Bhuyans of Eastern Bengal', *JASB*, 1874, Part I, No. III, p. 197.
16. In case of Bengal, it is said that the "eclipse of royal authority at centre of Government of Bengal was the opportunity of these usurpers of neighbours's territories; they had their brief day in the twilight between the setting Afghan kingship and the rising Mughal Empire in Bengal."—Sir. J. N. Sarkar (ed), *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Patna, 1973, p. 226, (henceforth abbreviated as HBS, II.)
17. M. Neog, *Sankardeva and His Times*, Gauhati University, 1965, p. 52 (henceforth abbreviated as SHTN).
18. *Riyaz*, p. 132.
19. EIM, p. 412.
20. EHKB, p. 189.
21. H. N. Dattabaruah, (ed), *Gurucarit* by Ramcharan Thakur, Gauhati, 529 *Sankarabda* (1978), vv. 83-95, (henceforth, abbreviated as GCR); U.C. Lekharu, (ed), *Katha Guru Carit*, Nalbari, 1952, p. 12 (henceforth KGC).
22. They were Srihari, Sripathi, Sridhara, Chidananda, Sadananda, Hari and Chandivara. See KGC, p. 12; EHKB, p. 186.
23. They were Gandharva Bhuyan, Sripathi Datta, Budha Khan, Lohavara and Chanugiri; EHKB, p. 186.
24. N. N. Vasu, *op. cit.*, p. 248fn. M. Neog, *Prachya Sasanawali*, Gauhati, 1974, pp. (Intro), 139f (henceforth abbreviated as PSN).
25. GCR, vv. 2585-2588.

26. HAG, p. 39.
27. M. I. Borah, (tr.) *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, Vol. I, DHAS, Gauhati, 1936, p. 412; KB, p. 35.
28. ABGB, p. 43; KGC, p. 61.
- 28a. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
29. Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, (ed). S.K. Bhuyan, DHAS, Gauhati, 1963, pp. 30f; EIM, pp. 619ff.
30. DRV, vv. 120-122.
31. *Ibid.*, vv. 90-120.
32. D. Barkataki, (ed), *Mahapurusha Sankaradeva* by Bhushan Dvija, Jorhat, 1925, vv. 370-377 (henceforth MSB); GCR, vv. 2529-2536.
33. DRV, vv. 93-95.
34. *Ibid.*, v. 118.
35. *Ibid.*, vv. 121-122.
36. SHTN, p. 54
37. J. P. Wade, *An Account of Assam* (ed), B. Sarma, North-Lakhimpur, 1927, pp. 186ff, (henceforth abbreviated as AAAW).
38. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
41. *Ibid.*
42. ABGB, p. 46; E. A. Gait, 'The Koch Kings of Kamarupa', *JASB*, 1893, Vol. LXII, Part I, Nos. I-IV, p. 283.
43. DRV, v. 230.
44. *Ibid.*, vv. 231-235.
45. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed). *Assam Buranji or Sri Sri, Svarganarayandev Maharajar Janma carita*, DHAS, Gauhati, 1960, p. 25, (henceforth abbreviated as ABSMJC).
46. DRV, vv. 242-249.
47. EIM, p. 419.
48. Ms. chronicle, *Prasiddhanarayanar Vamsavali*; Gait, *The Koch Kings of Kamarupa*, *loc. cit.*, pp. 303f.
49. G. C. Barua, (tr.), *Ahom Buranji*, Calcutta, 1930, p. 77 (henceforth abbreviated as AB).
50. ABSMJC, p. 25.
51. KGC, p. 58.
52. So called because they were first issued by Naranarayan.
53. S. N. Sen, (ed.), *Prachin Bangla Patra Sankalan*, Calcutta University, 1942, pp. 2, 4f, 20, 74 (letter nos. 4,5,15, 64), (henceforth abbreviated as PBPSS).
54. KB, Appendix C, p. 134.
55. PBPSS, p. 2.
56. He was 16 years of age at the time of his capturing power; DRV, v. 89.
57. DRV, v. 273.
58. *Ibid.*, v. 151.
59. S. C. Ghosal, *A History of Koch Behar* being a translation of Khan,

Choudhury's *Koch Beharer Itihas*, Koch Behar, 1942, p. 287 (henceforth abbreviated as HCGH).

60. *Ibid.*, p. 289
61. DRV, vv. 163-164.
62. See, *Infra*, p. 171.
63. DRV, vv. 164-169.
64. *Ibid.*, vv. 170-172.
65. *Ibid.*, v. 198.
66. Nafis Ahmed Siddiqui, *Population Geography of Muslims of India*, New Delhi, 1976, p. 35.
67. G. R. Barua, *Assam Bandhu*, Calcutta, 1885, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 3.
68. DRV, vv. 196-197.
69. *Ibid.*, vv. 173-193.
70. *Ibid.*, vv. 255-264.
71. AAAW, pp. 193f.
72. H. C. Goswami (ed.), *Purani Asam Buranji*, Gauhati, 1977, pp. 47ff, (henceforth abbreviated as PAB); DAB, p. 107; ABSMJC, pp. 23ff. In the DAB the date is given as *Saka* 1427 (A.D. 1505) which, as we have shown, is not tenable. The PAB gives the date as *Saka* 1455 (A. D. 1533) which may be taken as true because Thankham or Chankham became Bargohain in A. D. 1532, S. K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji* by Harakanta Baruah, Gauhati, 1962, p. 25 (henceforth abbreviated as ABHB).
73. PAB, p. 49; ABSMJC, p. 23; P. C. Choudhury, (ed.), *Asam Buranji Sar*, Gauhati, 1964, p. 19 (henceforth ABS).
74. ABSMJC, p. p. 24. In AAAW, p. 191, these territories are referred to as Serpur, Potladoh, Engharasendur, Kamrup and Dhekeri.
75. DAB, p. 107.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 107; ABSMJC, p. 28.
77. DRV, v. 317.
78. AB, p. 77.
79. DRV, v. 318; ABSMJC, p. 11.
80. HBS, II, p. 158.
81. DAB, pp. 23, 28.
82. MNEFPB pp. 86fn.
83. The *Alamgirnama* mentions that Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah compelled the *Raja* of Assam to retreat to the mountains. But when the rainy season came, the *Raja* came down the hills and killed all the Muhammadans, reoccupied the country, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1970, p. 137. But we do not know of any *Asam Raja* (Ahom king) as being put to such straits by Ala-ud-din nor do we know about Nilambar's coming to power after his defeat at the hands of Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah in A. D. 1498. The fugitive *Asam Raja*, therefore, might be no other than Biswa Singha.
84. DAB, p. 23.
85. MNEFPB, pp. 85fn.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
87. Ms. *Kharganarayanar Vamsavali*.
88. *HCGh*, pp. 113f.
89. *DRV*, v 207; *ABGB*, p. 40.
90. According to Khan Choudhury (*HCGh*, p. 114), the transfer took place after Biswa Singha's campaign against the Ahom kingdom in A.D. 1537.
91. J. N. Ghosh, *Rajopakhyana*, Calcutta, 1874, (tr.), Rabinson, Ms. in possession of DHAS, Gauhati.
92. F. Hamilton, *op. cit.*, pp. 67f.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
94. Ms. *Rajopakhyana* (tr.).
95. *ABGB*, p. 42.
96. Ms. *Rajopakhyana* (tr.).
97. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 34; The *Gurucaritas* also refer to the atrocities committed by the Bhutiyas. *GCR*, vv. 192-210; *KGC*, p. 15; Major F. Jenkins, 'A Report on Koch Behar', *Selections from the Records of Government of Bengal*, No. 5, Calcutta, 1851, p. 31.
98. Ms. *Rajopakhyana* (tr.).
99. Bondopadhyaya and Das, (ed.), *Koch Behar Jelar Purakirti*, Calcutta, 1974, p. 13, (henceforth abbreviated as *KJPK*).
100. *ABSMJC*, pp. 38f.
101. *Encyclopaedia Asistica*, Vol. VI, New Delhi, 1974, p. 987.
102. *HAG*, p. 51.
103. Sikkim Terai is peopled by the Dhimal, the Bodo, or Mech and the Koch people; Hooker, *Himalayan Journey*, I, p. 266 and also *Elephants Journey*, pp. 39, 173, cited in *Encyclopaedia Asiatica*, p. 848.
104. It is said that there are still in Koch Behar some people called *Marangia* who have a tradition that they were made over to Naranarayan by the king of Morung as a result of the treaty, *HAG*, p. 51. An Assamese chronicle, however, mentions that Naranaryana had to stay away from his capital Koch Behar for a brief period because he was afraid of an attack from the king of Morung, *KB*, p. 13. This shows that relations between the two kingdoms were not cordial towards the last years of the region of Naranarayan.
105. Ms. *Maharaja Vamsavali* by Ripunjay Das.
106. *DRV*, v. 114.
107. *Ibid.*, v. 114.
108. *KJPK*, p. 14.
109. Ms. chronicle, containing an account of the legendary kings of Kamarupa and the Koch kings, DHAS, Gauhati.
110. *HAG*, p. 50; *ABGB*, p. 41; *HCGh*, p. 119.
111. *HCGh*, p. 121.

112. *Ibid.*, p. 114. KJPk, p. 13.
113. A. K. Chakravarti, *Literature in Kamata-Koch Behar Raj Darbar*, Dhubri, 1964, p. 67.
114. DRV, vv. 266-267.
115. MNEFP, p. 74.

CHAPTER 3

Climax of Koch Power and Glory: Reign of Naranarayan

With the accession of Naranarayan the history of the Koches entered into a brilliant chapter of military glory and cultural achievements. This illustrious ruler established the Koch sovereignty almost in the entire north-east and made it important enough to get recognition in the court of Mughal Delhi. Thus the Koches could play an important role in the contemporary Indian political scene, particularly in regard to the Mughal policy in the north-east.

Problems of His Accession

Naranarayan's accession to the throne was, however, not a smooth one. As stated earlier, Biswa Singha had left behind him eighteen sons each of whom was assigned with separate duties.¹ While the eldest Nara Singha was asked to rule over Bhutan,² Malladev *alias* Naranarayan was selected as his successor and Sukladhvaj *alias* Chilarai as the *Yuvaraja*. As it was Malladev and Sukladhvaj who were to wield the machinery of administration, they were expected to have sound knowledge in state-craft as well as in the religious texts and techniques of war. Biswa Singha, therefore, sent both of them to Benaras for higher education. So when Biswa Singha was on his death-bed, these two brothers were not present in the capital. Taking advantage of the situation, Nara Singha declared himself king undoubtedly with the support of a section of the courtiers. He, however, could not hold his position long. The supporters of Malladev and Sukladhvaj with the aid of their nurse, com-

municated the developments in the capital to them and asked them to come immediately to take charge of administration.³ On receiving the news, Malladev and Sukladvaj rushed to the capital. Nara Singha with his supporters tried to resist their advance, but as most of the courtiers took the side of Malladev and Sukladvaj, Nara Singha failed to continue his resistance and fled to the Morung country along with his family.⁴

Nara Singha was hotly pursued by the two brothers. In the Morung country, asylum being refused to him, Nara Singha fled first to Nepal and then to Kashmir. Finally, however, he managed to come to Bhutan and as per instruction of his father Biswa Singha, ruled in the area there which was conquered by the latter.⁵

After the expulsion of Nara Singha, Malladev ascended to the throne amidst pomp and grandeur and took the name Naranarayan. A 'Chap' (seal) was made on this occasion with his name 'Sri Sri Naranarayan' inscribed thereon.⁶ It is also possible that he issued coins on the occasion to which references are there in certain *Gurucaritas*, although silver coins of his bearing the date 1477 *Saka* (A.D. 1555) only are extant. His coins are called *Narani* or *Narayani* and they had on one side the name of the god Siva and on the other the name of the king, both in Devanagari character.*

Since the accession of Naranarayan, the appellation *Narayan* became used after the names of the kings of that line. Naranarayan himself was also known as Mallanarayan. Undoubtedly, the nomenclature was made at the suggestion of the Brahmin priests, who, in order to ascribe a divine origin to the ruling family elevated it to the status of god Narayan and called its members *Gosains*. Thus Naranarayan was also called as *Mal-gosain*.⁷ However, it was the appellation *Narayan* which was preferred by the ruling family and this appellation since the days of Naranarayan became their dynastic title.

Sukladvaj later on became better known as Chilarai or the 'Kite King'.⁸ According to the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* he earned this appellation when he crossed the Bharali river on horse back in course of his expedition against the Ahoms, because in undertaking this operation he exhibited the 'dash and rapidity

* See Plate No. V.

of movement' of a kite. His soldiers, impressed by these qualities called him 'Chilarai' or the 'Kite King'.⁹ Chilarai was not only the *Yuvaraja* with the power and status of a Prime Minister, but also the Commander-in-Chief. He was also known as *Sangram Singha* or *Samar Singha*.

Date of Naranarayan

In the previous chapter we have discussed the controversy regarding the date of Biswa Singha and placed his reign between c. A.D. 1515-1540. In that case the usurpation of Nara Singha is to be placed in the same year *i.e.* A.D. 1540. As stated above, Nara Singha ruled only for a brief period. It is therefore reasonable to hold that Naranarayan became king in that very year *i.e.* A.D. 1540. However, there is a difference of opinion regarding Naranarayan's date also. Scholars like Gunabhiram Baruah place the death of Naranarayan in A.D. 1584.¹⁰ According to Gait also the reign of Naranarayan ended in the year A.D. 1584.¹¹ P.N. Gohain Barooah too supports this view.¹² On the other hand, historians like Khan Choudhury place Naranarayan's demise in A.D. 1587,¹³ and this date finds support from numismatic evidences also. The earliest coins of Raghudev narayan, son of Chilarai, are dated A.D. 1588.¹⁴ It is a fact that immediately after the death of Naranarayan, Raghudev had declared his independence and issued coins in his name. In that case Naranarayan's death may be placed in A.D. 1588 or a little before this date. Again, the earliest coins of Lakshminarayan, son and successor of Naranarayan, are dated *Saka* 1509 (A.D. 1587) which shows that he became king by that date and minted coins in his name.¹⁵ One such coin of Lakshminarayan has very recently been discovered and it is now preserved in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Gauhati. The coin is dated 1509 *Saka* (A.D. 1587).¹⁶ Since minting of coins was made usually on occasions of their accessions, it may be contended that Naranarayan died in A.D. 1587, in which year his son Lakshminarayan became king and issued coins in his own name; and in the following year Raghudev declared his independence, and as a mark of it he also minted coins in his name. So, Naranarayan's reign may justly be placed between A.D. 1540-1587.

Contemporary Political Conditions in Bengal and Assam

The contemporary political scene in Bengal when Naranarayan was ruling in Koch Behar, was one of confusion and disorder. Sher Khan Sur (1540-1545), the founder of the Sur dynasty, had defeated Ghiyasuddin Mahmud (1533-1538), the last ruler of the Hussain Shahi dynasty on April 6, 1538 and established his hold over Bengal and offered a challenge to the growing Mughal power in Delhi. As a result, Humayun (1530-1556), who succeeded Babar in 1530 soon came into conflict with Sher Shah, and the latter by inflicting serious defeats on Humayun in the battles of Chausa (1539) and Kanauj (1540), not only consolidated his position in Bengal, but also became the emperor of Delhi. However, this political relations of Bengal with Delhi continued only for a period of thirteen years (1540-1553) when after the death of Islam Shah, the successor of Sher Shah at Delhi, Bengal broke off again.¹⁷ The first independent ruler of Bengal after this event was Shams-ud-din Muhammad Shah (1553-1555), who was succeeded by his son Ghiyasud-din Bahadur Shah (1555-1560) and Jalal Shah Ghiyasud-din II (1560-1563) respectively. After them, one Ghiyasud-din III ruled for a period of one year, who closed his career by A.D. 1564 leaving the Bengal throne to be occupied by the Karrani Sultans. We shall see that it was during the rule of Sulaiman Karrani of the line (1565—1572) that a conflict took place between the Koch king Naranarayan and the Afghan Sultan.

In the meantime, Humayun, who re-established himself at Delhi in A.D. 1545, was succeeded by his minor son Akbar (1556-1605) who defeated Hemu, the general of Muhammad Shah Adil, the last vestige of the line of Sher Shah, at the battle of Panipat in November, 1556, placed the Mughal power 'beyond challenge'¹⁸ and Akbar extended the eastern frontier of Mughal empire as far as the Son river in Bihar.¹⁹ Sulaiman Karrani, the shrewd politician and intelligent opportunist, followed a peaceful policy towards Akbar and appeased his viceroys on the western border by "means of friendly communications and rich presents".²⁰ But his son and successor Daud Khan Karrani (1572-1574) "a foolish hot-headed sensual youth"

roused the wrath of Akbar who not only defeated him, but also occupied Bengal and made it a permanent province of the Mughal empire in July, 1576.²¹

The road for direct relations between Koch Behar and the Mughal empire, the eastern boundary of which now touched the western frontier of the former, became open. It is, however, interesting to note that this new relation was not like the one that existed between the previous Koch king and the Afghan rulers of Bengal so that the former animosity soon gave way to friendly relations.

While such changes in the political conditions had been going on in the western part of the Brahmaputra valley, in the eastern part, the Ahoms had successfully resisted the Muslim invasions of 1527-1533, and had meanwhile extended their sway to the Dhansiri valley in the south bank and the river Bharali in the north bank under their powerful king Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539). These conquests were followed by fruitful consolidation during the reigns of the Dihingia Raja's successors Suklenmung or Gargayan Raja (1539-1552) and Sukhampha or Khora Raja (1552-1603). It was, therefore, certain that the westward expansion of the Ahoms and the eastward expansion of the Koches would come into a clash sooner or later and the event actually happened soon after Naranarayan's accession to the throne. The occupation of the Chutiya kingdom on the north and that of the Kachari kingdom on the south of the Brahmaputra, had given the Ahoms an exclusive control over the major part of the Brahmaputra valley. But the Ahoms were tactful enough to avoid arousing any wrath of the Koches, who had been a natural guard against the imperial Mughals. On the other hand, Naranarayan also did not like to incur displeasure of his powerful western neighbours, whether Afghans or Mughals,²² and therefore, remained quiet for some time, although later on, he was compelled to play an expensive war against Sulaiman Karrani. Naranarayan who wanted to push further to the east to establish his sovereign power in the entire north-east, became keen in defying the allegiance paid to the Ahoms since the days of his father Biswa Singha.²³ The question was thus one of establishing hegemony in the Brahmaputra valley. The Ahoms, the other powerful Mongoloid

power challenged the Koches and thus began the chapter of Ahom-Koch rivalry which terminated with the success of the Ahoms and the establishment of the Koch princeling Balinarayan *alias* Dharmanarayan at Darrang by the Ahom king Pratap Singha (A.D. 1603-1641) in A.D. 1615.

Koch-Ahom Conflicts

The chronicles of both the Koches and the Ahoms give details of the circumstances leading to a conflict between the two powers. Thus it is narrated that having met with a failure in his campaign against the Ahoms, Biswa Singha could not reconcile himself to his subordination and so even at his death-bed, he asked his sons to take appropriate steps to revoke the Ahom vassalage.²⁴ According to the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, Naranarayan, therefore, immediately after his accession to the throne prepared for a war against the Ahoms.²⁵

One *Buranji* states that in *Saka* 1465 (A.D. 1543), Ram Singha, Dip Singha and Hemadhar, the three brothers of Naranarayan, were at Sala, above Kaliabar on the south bank of the Brahmaputra with three thousand soldiers.²⁶ It is possible that besides keeping guard in the frontier outposts of the kingdom, they carried on their respective duties of looking after exports and imports of silver and copper.²⁷ The *Buranji* also mentions that they captured five Ahom boat-men on the Sala river possibly because they encroached the boundary and carried on illegal trade. The result was that the Ahom *Bar-Sandikoi* and the *Deka-Raja* (both of them being civil-cum-military officers) attacked the Koch garrison stationed there. But the Ahoms met with a reprisal and the *Bar-Sandikoi* was seriously injured by Hemadhar. One hundred Ahom soldiers were killed and their heads were piled up at Bhomoramukh.²⁸

In January, 1546, the Koch forces advanced farther east and reached as far as Changinimukh on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. But the Ahoms immediately took offensive and gave a good counter to the invading army. Dip Singha fell fighting and his wife was brought a prisoner. Altogether fourteen elephants were captured and there was wide confusion in the Koch camp.²⁹ Some of the soldiers fled to the forests

and many others fell dead. The other two princes, Ramchandra and Hemadhar, also fell in the field.³⁰

This incident led Naranarayan to lead a campaign against the Ahoms in 1546. The Koch army advanced as far east as the river Dikrai on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. It is recorded in the *Buranjis*³¹ that the Ahom Prime Minister Aikhek Buragohain advocated this time a no-war policy with the Koches when the king discussed the matter with his nobles. But his proposal was not taken into account, and the Ahom army under the command of Thaomung Banglung, Thaopim and other officers, met the Koches on the river Dikrai. They crossed the river twice and attacked the Koches but failed to achieve anything. The Koches who fought with bows and arrows succeeded in killing a number of Ahom soldiers including Thaomung Banglung and some other important officials. Thereupon the Ahoms retreated and at a place called Karanga they crossed the Brahmaputra and reached Kaliabar.³² There also they suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Koches who had hotly pursued them and compelled them to retreat farther to Sala. The advancing Koch army continued to pursue the Ahoms and again defeated them at that place with considerable losses. But the Ahoms soon resumed fighting with their elephantry and within a short time inflicted a serious defeat on the Koches who then retreated through the Brahmaputra.³³ The Ahoms then constructed forts and stationed garrisons on the south of the Brahmaputra and remained well-prepared for any future eventuality.³⁴

Koch Invasion of the Ahom Kingdom: The Battle of Pichala (A.D. 1547)

The Koches soon repaired their losses and in the following year (i.e., A.D. 1547) invaded the Ahom territory again. Sailing up the Brahmaputra the Koch soldiers reached as far as Narayanpur on the north-western corner of the present Lakhimpur district and constructed a fort there.³⁵ The Ahom king Suklenmung stationed his forces at the fort on the opposite bank of the Pichala river and waited for an opportune moment to attack the enemy. The initiative was, however, taken by the Koches themselves. But the Ahom forces

remained firm, and waited for a better advantage of the situation. Suklenmung divided his forces into three divisions, himself remaining in the fort and instructing the navy to struck the Koches from behind and the army to attack the Koch garrison from all sides. In this way the Koch forces were pressed hard at all fronts. Finding no way out they finally yielded. The *Buranjis*³⁶ record that not less than 5000 Koch soldiers were massacred; their heads were brought to Mathadang, a place in the Sibsagar district, and cremated there.³⁷ The Ahom soldiers also got two horses from the Koches. The victorious Ahoms king then returned to the capital and performed the *Rikvan* ceremony as a mark of their victory.³⁸

Cessation of Hostilities: Peace Proposals from the Koches

It is possible that after this defeat Naranarayan thought of a reprisal. But before taking up arms again he decided to send a diplomatic peace mission to the Ahom court in *Saka* 1477 (A.D. 1555) with a view to gathering some information regarding Ahom attitude towards the Koches. The mission was led by Satananda Karji, Rameswar Sarma, Kalaketu, Dhuma Sardar, Udbhanda Chauliya and Syamrai.³⁹ Besides he sent a letter to the Ahom king Sukhampha which ran as follows :

Let there be auspiciousness to *Maharaja Sri Sri Svarganarayan* of great prowess, whose virtues are sung by nymphs in all the universe, who is an ocean of learning, of fortitude and glory; whose pure body is sanctified by the waters of the heavenly river of gods; whose fame is spotless like snow. . . .

So be it written. I am well and I always wish your welfare. The seed of good feeling between us will germinate if pleasing letters be now exchanged between us. . . . I am prepared to do my part and you should do yours. . . .⁴⁰

Along with this letter Naranarayan also sent the following articles as presents to the Ahom *Svargadeo*: one pillow, one bow, one pair of 'Cheng fish', one *Jakoi* (a kind of instrument

made of bamboo for catching fish), five pieces of *Saris*, one piece of *Gomcheng* (Chinese silk), two *ghuris* (petticoats), twenty pieces of black and ten pieces of white hides and ten pieces of *Khagaris* (a kind of reed).⁴¹ When the mission reached the Ahom capital of Garhgaon, the *Svargadeo* asked Aikhek, the Buragohain to receive them. The envoys presented the letter along with these articles to the Buragohain and reminded him that since the time of the Ahom conquest of Gaur (definitely referring to the invasion of Turbak) there had been friendly relations between the two kingdoms, and the Koch king, 'through all ages (meaning the time since the days of Biswa Singha) had been regarding the Ahom monarch as his only survivor'.⁴² But what was the value of such friendship when the brothers of the Koch king were killed by the Ahoms.⁴³ The Buragohain who received the envoys on behalf of the king, replied that friendships between the *Kshatriyas* were bound to be of such nature. He said:

Where have you seen friendship subsisting between *Kshatriyas*? Lips are beaten by the teeth. Should we, therefore, cause an infringement of the old bonds of friendship? Everything will be accomplished if he is intent on continuing friendly relations with the *Svargadeo*.⁴⁴

However, as regards the articles presented by the Koch envoys, the Buragohain Aikhek said that they were quite ordinary and unfit for exhibiting in a royal court. Further, the Buragohain found fault with the latter's etiquette and made some adverse comments on their manners and customs betrayed by them in course of their interview with him.⁴⁵ He also wrote a letter to the Koch king Naranarayan on behalf of the *Svargadeo* expressing his dissatisfaction with the presents. The letter was despatched to the Koch court through two Brahmin *Katakis* (messengers), Chandibar Sarma and Damodar Sarma. The letter contained the following words in regard to the presents sent to the Ahom king:

However, the things which you have sent through your *Ukils* (envoys), are not fit to be shown in a royal court. Such things would naturally appear proper to those who

are accustomed to them The following presents are sent to you—two pieces of *Nara cloth* (a special kind of cotton cloth made by the Naras), four elephant tusks and two bags of *Gathiyans* (a kind of fragrant root), 10th *Asar*, *Saka* 1478.⁴⁶

Reading the contents of the letter, the Koch king understood the attitude of the Ahoms that they were bent upon challenging the Koches as the master of the Brahmaputra valley. Naranarayan, therefore, asked Chilarai to prepare for an immediate campaign against the Ahoms. This shows that the Koch king who was resolved to make conquests at the cost of the Ahoms wanted to humiliate the Ahom king by sending certain presents, as mentioned above, which were sure to wound the prestige of the Ahom monarch. That Naranarayan prepared for a fresh conflict can be understood from his own remark :

How can we be friendly with them when they have killed our brothers? In which way we are incapable? What can be done, should be done (immediately).⁴⁷

War Preparations

Naranarayan was well-aware of the difficulties of communications between the Koch and the Ahom kingdoms which proved a serious problem to his father in 1537 and to his own forces in 1547. He, therefore, appointed his brother Kamal Narayan *alias* Gosain Kamal (his name was corrupted in Assam as Gohain Kamal) to build a road connecting Koch Behar with the eastern frontier of his kingdom on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Accordingly the road known as *Gosain Kamal Ali* was constructed along the foot of the Bhutan and the Daffa (Nishi) hills, and within a year the work was complete.⁴⁸ The road was built in a haste. This is evident from an incident recorded in an Assamese chronicle that a Brahmin, whose house laid on the line of the road, found no time even to take his meal before his house had been demolished.⁴⁹

Resumption of War

The great work being complete, Chilarai organised his forces of 60,000 men⁵⁰ and marched against the Ahoms in the later part of 1562. He divided his forces into two divisions—the infantry being placed under the command of Bhimbal and Bahubal Patra and the navy in charge of Bhakatmal and Tepu. The infantry under the supreme command of Chilarai in its front, and followed by the king Naranarayan accompanied by his consort Bhanumati at the back, advanced through the *Gosain Kamal Ali* and reached Narayanpur. On their way, the Bhutiyas who were tributary to the Koches since the time of Biswa Singha,⁵¹ offered their submission to Naranarayan and joined his forces.⁵² The Daflas who had also unfriendly relations with the Ahoms,⁵³ and the Bhuyans who had been mercilessly suppressed by Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja, and whose relations with the Ahoms till then were not cordial, also offered to join the Koches.⁵⁴ In the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, it is mentioned that on his way, Naranarayan halted at a place on the bank of the Sonkosh river, where he organised all the Mech-Kachari people and obtained their support.⁵⁵ He then encamped at a place called Tematumani in the present Mangaldoi sub-division where twelve groups of the tribal people submitted to the Koch king.⁵⁶ In another place called Chandikabehar in the same subdivision near Bhairavkunda, Naranarayan ordered for the building of a temple of goddess Durga and a hill fort. The constructions being complete, an image of the goddess was installed in the temple and a *Kachari* was made its priest. He further instructed the Meches and the Koches living to the north of the *Gosain Kamal Ali* to follow their tribal customs, but in the territory south of this road as far as the Brahmaputra, Brahmanic rites were to be continued. Such acts of Naranarayan were definitely guided by diplomatic motives. Thereby he not only secured the support of all the tribes of the region, but also the help of some Brahmins of Narayanpur. Thus it is recorded in an Assamese chronicle that one Brahmin Bhuyan of Narayanpur gave an elephant to Naranarayan and joined his forces.⁵⁷ Thenceforward, the Koches advanced to Singri and then reached the Bharali river. All local sources state that Sukladhvaj jumped on horseback and

crossed the river Bharali and thereby earned for himself the appellation Chilarai.⁵⁸ The *Vamsavali* records that about this time the Chutiya princelings who had been dethroned and dispersed from their ancestral kingdom by the Ahom king Suhungmung in 1523, came to Naranarayan and sought his shelter and protection. The latter established them at a place called Bahbari in Darrang.⁵⁹ Finally, Naranarayan and Chilarai reached Narayanpur and encamped there.

The naval force under Tepu and Bhakatmal sailed through the Brahmaputra and reached Sala where they defeated the Ahom force and proceeded as far as Marangi.⁶⁰ With this initial victory and no further opposition from the Ahoms, the Koch navy proceeded as far as the mouth of the Dikhow river where they constructed a fort and encamped there.⁶¹ The *Svargadeo* Sukhampha *alias* Khora Raja (1552-1603) immediately appointed a number of important officers including Aikhek Buragohain, who was to be the commander-in-chief of the army, the *Charingia Raja* and the *Tipamiya Raja* and sent them to fight the Koches on the Dikhow.⁶² They constructed a fort on the opposite side of the enemy's camp and waited for an attack. The king also stationed another force on the bank of the Sessa river and the Buragohain and the *Tipamiya Raja* were put at its command. At night a skirmish occurred on the Dikhow where the Koches fired guns and dispersed the Ahoms. The former then retreated to the river Handia where a battle took place and the Ahoms were again routed. A number of their high officers fell dead and one was captured alive.⁶³

The Koch infantry, now stationed at Narayanpur, however, faced a treacherous defeat at the hands of the Ahoms. It is recorded that the Ahom king Sukhampha, knowing well about the pious nature of the Koch king and the *Yuvaraja*, and their respect for cows and Brahmins played a trick. He sent many of his soldiers disguised as Brahmins with their sacred threads raised to their ears and their sacred marks making prominent on their foreheads and making them seated on cows.⁶⁴ The result bore the desired fruit. The Koch soldiers at the instruction of their commander, considering them to be real Brahmins withdrew from the field for the fear of the consequence of killing both cows and Brahmins.

In the meantime, repeated failures at Sala and Marangi, betrayal of some of the important officers of the court including the king's brother Tamulnokhowa who joined the Koches,⁶⁵ and the joining of the Chungis, a section of the Moran people, who used to catch and train elephants for the Ahom king, to the camp of the invaders, compelled the Ahom king Sukhampha to propose a peace treaty with the Koches. Accordingly, the *Charing Raja*, in consultation with other officials, sent three envoys to the Koch king Naranarayan, who received them cordially and reciprocated by sending his envoy Ratikanta to the Ahom court with the following message :

We are in friendly terms for a long time. We are descendants of gods as our forefathers were sons of gods. We are living as brothers. In the ancient time a girl was offered to us by the king of Assam. This friendship of ours should continue to our descendants. It is not proper to be in hostility. So the king of the east should arrange to settle the affairs in such a way so that both the countries may enjoy peace and prosperity.⁶⁶

Presents and good wishes were also exchanged. But the end came at the beginning; and Chilarai who somehow came to know how he was tricked by the Ahom king to avoid fighting, soon reorganised his forces and renewed conflict in January, 1563. The naval force under Tepu and Bhakatmal then stationed on the Handia river, immediately marched forward and reached again as far as the mouth of the Dikhow. The infantry under the command of Chilarai crossed the Brahmaputra and encamped at Mechagarh in April, 1563.⁶⁷ Meanwhile the Koches overrunning the Kachari territory, devastated Marangi and another division of them under general Tepu advanced up the Brahmaputra to attack the strategic Ahom fort at Dihing. At this the Ahom garrison stationed there deserted the fort and retreated to Abhayapur. The situation thus became highly critical for the Ahom king, who having no way out fled from the capital along with the nobles to take shelter in a place called Charaikhorong in the Naga hills; the victorious Koch soldiers then entered the capital at Garhgaon.⁶⁸

Conclusion of Peace

The Ahom king now become anxious for conclusion of a peace and in his place of resort he discussed the matter in a council of the officers and nobles. He then deputed Buragohain Aikhek to king Naranarayan, who was then stationed at Majuli to use for peace and sent two gold vessels, two silver vessels and a silver jar as presents.⁶⁹ Naranarayan, however, refused to accept this proposal. He said to the Ahom Buragohain:

Please tell the king of Udaygiri (the east) that he must give me the sons of the three *Gohains* as well as of Sudang and Khamsen (two Ahom commanders). Only then I shall return leaving the kingdom of the Svargadeo unmolested.⁷⁰

He also demaded the best elephant, 'Khamring' and the swiftest horse 'Pakhiraj' from the Ahom king. This was conveyed to Sukhampha at Charaikhorong who accepted it without hesitation and sent five sons of the chief Ahom nobles in July, 1563 to Naranarayan.⁷¹ Besides the payment of a large indemnity consisting of sixty elephants, sixty pieces of cloth and a quantity of gold and silver and the elephant 'Khamring' and the horse 'Pakhiraj', the Ahom king also ceded to Naranarayan the whole territory from the river Suvansiri lying to the north of the Brahmaputra.⁷² The Koch king thereupon returned after making proper administrative arrangements of the newly acquired territory. He appointed one Ujir Bamun (possibly a Brahmin Bhuyan), one Tapashi Laskar and another Malamulya Laskar as the *Rajkhowas* (revenue-cum-administrative officer) to administer the region.⁷³ Naranarayan also stationed a garrison at Narayanpur and established *chowkies* (outposts) at suitable intervals.⁷⁴ It is recorded in certain Assamese chronicles⁷⁵ that Chilarai also took with him some artisans, scholars and poets from the Ahom kingdom.⁷⁶ The Koch forces then retreated downstream the Brahmaputra.

Thus the Ahoms who so long proved almost invincible in the eastern Brahmaputra valley, became a feudatory of the Koches and in that year of Koch victory all the tributes were paid to the Koch king.⁷⁷ Thus the Koches won the contest for hegemony of the Brahmaputra valley and became its undisputed

master. The military skill of Chilarai and the means of transport and communication made by him greatly determined the fate of the war in favour of the Koches. Whereas the astute Koch king could gain the support of all the tribes of his region as well as of the Bhuyans, the Ahoms failed to organise even the strength of the Chutiyas, whom they subjugated. On the other hand, the Chutiyas whose dominions had been dismantled by the Ahoms, only awaited an opportune moment to hit upon them, and so also the Bhuyans and the Chungis. Further, the Ahom king even failed to get loyalty of all his officers, so that a few of them deserted to the Koches and divulged the military secrets to the Koch camp. This had demoralised the Ahom king. The Koch king made proper arrangement for administering the areas they conquered enroute to the Ahom capital. They also established a line of forts at strategic place like Tematumani, Chandika-behar, Narayanpur and Majuli which were of much advantage in undertaking the military operations. The Koches also knew when to play offensive and when to play defensive; when to strike and when to yield. Besides, the support of all the Mongoloid tribes on the north of the Brahmaputra greatly strengthened Naranarayan. When the Chutiyas and the Bhuyans who knew advanced methods of war, joined the Koches, the Ahoms, as stated, became considerably weak. It is recorded in an Assamese chronicle that Sankardeva, the propagator of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam, became instrumental in giving Chilarai an intelligence to bribe the Ahom officers in order to collect secret information of Ahom military preparations.⁷⁸ Above all was the daring personality of Chilarai, who won love and respect from all the followers and the soldiers in his camp and this played an important role in bringing a redounding victory to the Koches.

The victory was, however, shortlived. After three months of his stay in the Naga hills, the Ahom king Sukhampha returned to the capital at Garhgaon and took every step to recover his lost position and power, which would be discussed in another context.

Conquest of Other Neighbouring Countries

Kachar

After subjugating the Ahoms, Naranarayan and Chilarai

turned their attention towards conquering other neighbouring countries in the north-east. Their first target was Kachar, peopled by the Kacharis or Dimacas, a section of the Bodo tribe. In the 13th century the Kachari country also known as *Hidimbadesa* extended from the Dikhow to the Kalang river on the south of the Brahmaputra and included the valley of the Dhansiri and also the present North-Cachar sub-division.⁷⁹ But since the beginning of the 16th century, the Ahoms began vigorously extending their territories at the cost of the neighbouring kingdoms including that of the Kacharis. As a result, by A.D. 1536, they occupied the region of the Dhansiri valley and brought under their control the area as far as Dimapur.⁸⁰ At the time of the Koch invasion, therefore, the Kachari kingdom became considerably reduced in size. Its capital at that time was Maibong, situated on the bank of the Mohur river, south of Dimapur. Thus the kingdom then covered mainly the region of present North-Cachar and the Kalang valley in modern Nowgong district. It also appears that when Chilarai launched his campaign against Kachar, the country was not an independent one, because meanwhile, it became a part of the kingdom of Tripura, although retaining its autonomy.⁸¹

From what has been narrated in the *Vamsavali* it seems that the Koch army, sometime in 1564, soon after their victory against the Ahoms marched along the south of the Brahmaputra, accompanied parallel by the naval force which sailed downstream. The Koch army then halted at Marangi in the present Golaghat sub-division and built a fort there. It is said that the *Hedambeswar* (the king of Hidimba), submitted without fight and sued for peace.⁸² Unfortunately the name of the Kachari king is not recorded by the *Vamsavali*. Numismatic evidence shows that king Yosonarayan (c 1580-1610) was contemporary of Naranarayan. A coin bearing the date *Saka* 1505 (A.D. 1583) of this king has been found; but since the event took place soon after the Ahom was of 1563, it was evidently his predecessor Durlabhnarayan (c 1525-1580) who entered into this relationship with the Koch king.

Chilarai made an administrative centre at Brahmapur, later known as Khaspur in order to maintain diplomatic relations with the adjoining states and for the collection of tributes.⁸³ Kamalnarayan, popularly known as Gosain Kamal to whom

reference had already been made, was appointed the governor of Kachar who was called the first *Dewan-Raja*. It appears that he was like a Koch deputy to the Kachari *Raja* because the Kachari king was allowed to reign in his territory. In other words, the *Dewan Raja* became the *de facto* and the Kachari *Raja* the *de jure* sovereign in Kachar. Chilarai left a contingent of Koch soldiers at Brahmapur. These Koches came to be known as *Dehans*⁸⁴ after the name of Chilarai, who bore the title *Dewan*. As Gait points out they were "reputed to be the descendants of some Koches who accompanied Chilarai's army and remained in the country. They enjoyed special privileges in the days of Kachari rule, and their chief or *Senapati* was allowed to enter the king's courtyard in his palanquin".⁸⁵

The Koch conquests of Kachar had ended the Tripura sovereignty over that country. The Tripura king ought to have come to the aid of his feudatory Kachari *Raja* but for the fear of facing a defeat at the hands of the powerful Koches. As a result, Kachar came under the control of the Koches and Longai came to be recognised as the boundary between the Koch and Tripura territories.⁸⁶ Later, however, when the Koches suffered a defeat in the hands of Sulaiman Karrani of Bengal, most of the north-eastern states declared their independence and so did Meghanarayan (1566—1580), the Kachari *Raja*. Still then, the Koches continued to rule for more than a century in south Kachar and made a lasting impact on the cultural life of the region.

Manipur

The Kachar campaign concluded within a short time. The *Vamsavali* states that after the conquest of Kachar, Naranarayan and Chilarai sent *Katakis* or ambassadors to the king of Manipur demanding his submission.⁸⁷ The Manipuri king who may be identified with Muktawali Singha or Ripu Singha *alias* Meanglea (1561-1579),⁸⁸ having heard of the victorious campaigns of the Koch king in the kingdoms of Assam and Kachar, submitted of his own accord and agreed to pay him an annual tribute of 20,000 silver and 300 gold coins including ten elephants. Besides, he agreed to make an immediate payment of

20,000 silver and 1,000 gold coins and 40 elephants to buy peace of the Koch king.⁸⁹

The Koch forces now proceeded towards the kingdom of Jayantiya (supposed to be the female kingdom mentioned in the *Mahabharata*) which consisted of the Jayantiya hills and the plains tract south of it and north of the Surama or the Barak river. The chronology of the Jayantiya [kings shows that the ruler who came into conflict with the Koches was either Bar Gohain (1548—1564) or Bijay Manikya (1564-1580).⁹⁰ Unlike the kings of Kachar and Manipur, the Jayantiya ruler preferred to challenge the Koches and entered into an armed conflict with them. In the battle that followed, the Jayantiya king was slain, at which his son was installed on the throne.⁹¹ The new king gave the Koch general 100 horses, 10,000 silver and 1,000 gold coins including 100 special type of Jayantiya swords called *Khanga* as compensation for the war.⁹² It was also agreed that the vanquished king would pay an annual tribute of 10,000 silver coins, 70 select *Ghotakas* (horses) and 300 *Nakoidaos* (a special kind of knife).⁹³ The Jayantiya king then urged upon his Koch sovereign to accord him permission to mint coins in his name. But the practice being followed by independent rulers only, the Koch sovereign permitted him to mint coins with the mention of his capital (Jayantiyapur only on the one side and the name of their deity, namely Siva, on the other side).⁹⁴ This special concession in case of the Jayantiya king was allowed probably because a considerable volume of trade with Bengal passed through the kingdom of Jayantiya, and as such if the Jayantiya king was deprived of this right, trade relations of entire north-east would suffer. Naranarayan always encouraged trade pursuits and it was in the fitness of things that he made this special arrangement.

Tripura

The *Vamsavali* states that after the conquest of the Jayantiya kingdom Chilarai marched against the king of Tripura with 40,000 soldiers.⁹⁵ The details of the contemporary history of Tripura is not known. There is, however, no denying the fact that the name Tripura derived its origin from the Tipperas, a section of the Bodos, who at one time ruled not only the entire

Barak valley, but also a considerable portion of modern Sylhet and Comilla districts of present Bangladesh. Thereafter they moved eastward and established a kingdom at Kachar of which Tulshidhvaj was the reigning king in the 15th century.⁹⁶ In the first part of the 16th century, as stated earlier, they annexed Kachar. Meanwhile relations were established between the kings of Tripura and the Sultans of Bengal which often turned hostile. It appears that a portion of Tripura was conquered by Sultan Jalal-ud-din of Bengal (1418-1431) in the early part of the 15th century when Maha Manikya (c. 1400-1430) was ruling in Tripura.^{96a} Although Dhanya Manikya (1490-1515) conquered some portions of Bengal when Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah was ruling there, the latter also occupied a portion of Tripura as evidenced by the *Sonar Gaon Inscription* of A.D. 1513.⁹⁷ Such hostile relations between Tripura and Bengal often resulted in border clashes which continued till the Afghans were succeeded by the Mughals in Bengal. This political confusion in Tripura was a gaining factor for Chilarai. Numismatic evidences show that Deva Manikya (1520-1532), Vijaya Manikya (1532-1563) and his son Ananta Manikya (1564-1567) were the contemporaries of Biswa Singha and Naranarayana.⁹⁸ According to the source mentioned above, the Tripura king was slain in the field and as many as 18,000 of his soldiers were massacred. The battle was fought at Langai in the southern border of Kachar. The king's brother then submitted to the Koch king paying him 10,000 silver and 100 gold coins and 30 horses.⁹⁹ He was placed on the throne on his having consented to pay an annual tribute of 9,000 gold coins.¹⁰⁰ It is further stated that after occupying Tripura Naranarayan built there ramparts and excavated tanks.¹⁰¹

As for the identification of the Tripura king slain by the Koches in battle, it appears that he was Ananta Manikya. Not only chronologically but also from the references made in the *Rajamala*, it appears that king Vijaya Manikya who was a powerful ruler, would not have suffered such a miserable defeat, or if he had at all, then he would not have been eulogised as a man of prowess in their official chronicle. It was, therefore, his son and successor Ananta Manikya, an unworthy son of a worthy father who suffered the defeat along with loss of his

life at the hands of the Koches. The event might have happened in the early part of A.D. 1567.

There is, however, a controversy as to the authenticity of the Koch conquest of Tripura, for the event has not been mentioned in the chronicles of this kingdom. According to Gait, this omission in the 'Tippera' chronicles and the fact that the event narrated in the Koch *Vamsavali* is corroborated by only one Assamese *Buranji* of uncertain date "is not sufficient to establish it as an historical fact".¹⁰² Gait's contention however, does not appear acceptable because the 'Tippera' chroniclers might have avoided recording this humiliating defeat. On the other hand, the narration of the Koch chronicle is corroborated by not one, but two Assamese *Buranji* (namely, *Kamrupar Buranji* and *Deodhai Asam Buranji*).¹⁰³ This evidence the authenticity of the event.

Khairam

It is stated in the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* that the news of Chilarai's victorious campaigns had terrorised the ruler of Khairam was submitted without fight. Khairam was a hill state located to the north of the Jayantiya kingdom and was then ruled by a chief called Viryavanta,¹⁰⁴ who was called a *Raja*.¹⁰⁵ Its capital was at Nongkhreen, near modern Shillong.¹⁰⁶ The *Vamsavali* simply records that besides agreeing to pay an annual tribute, the *Khairami Raj* offered 60 elephants, 60 horses and 40,000 silver and 1,000 gold coins as presents. The *Raja* was then restored to his position but as an autonomous ruler. The *Khairami Raja* also was allowed to mint coins but in the name of the Koch king, though not a single coin of the type has yet been discovered. This indicates that for transacting commercial relations with the neighbouring states as well as with Bengal, this concession had to be made to the *Khairami Raja* in the larger interest of the Koch imperialistic designs.

Sylhet

Chilarai then turned his attention towards Sylhet, a kingdom located on the north of the river Kusiara, and which was the birth place of the great Vaishnava reformer Chaitanyadeva. In

the early part of the 14th century, the kingdom, at least its north-western part came under the Muslim Sultans of Bengal. During the days of these Sultans it was administered by a governor with the rank of a *Nawab* and under the Mughals by an *Amil*, who locally was called *Nawab*, but was himself subordinate to the *Nawab* of Dacca. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* refers to the governor as *Patsha* and to Sylhet as *Sirath*.^{*} The Bengal Sultan at that time was Sulaiman Karrani (1565-1572). When Naranarayan and Chilarai invaded Sylhet Sulaiman Karrani was engaged in a expedition against Orissa. The Orissan ruler Mukundadeva (1560-1567) had already welcomed a peace mission from emperor Akbar and gave him a formal understanding that in case Sulaiman would rise against Akbar, Mukundadeva would come to the aid of the latter and wage war against the Sultan of Bengal.¹⁰⁷ It is, therefore, possible that the Koch heroes took this situation as an advantage and invaded Sylhet. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* states that the *Patsha* of *Sirath* who was considerably powerful, gave a stiff resistance to the invading Koch forces so that Chilarai, after his three days' hard fight had to pursue new and more vigorous means with his methodical mind to compel the *Patsha* to succumb to death,¹⁰⁸ Asirai, the *Patsha's* brother offered his submission with presents of 100 elephants, 180 horses, 3,00,000 silver and 10,000 gold coins.¹⁰⁹ Besides, he also promised to pay an annual tribute of 100 elephants, 200 horses, 3,00,000 silver and 10,000 gold coins.¹¹⁰ King Naranarayan appointed him *Patsha* of Sylhet after obtaining from him the assurance of paying all kinds of gratitude and obeissance. The heavy amount of tributes imposed on the *Patsha*, as compared to those imposed upon the other conquered countries, the nature of warfare, and the reference to the *Patsha* as being powerful in the *Vamsavali*, lead us to conclude that Naranarayan's war with Sylhet cost him considerable losses of men and materials.

Suppression of the Chief of Dimarua and Straightening of the Course of the Brahmaputra

After subduing Sylhet Naranarayan and Chilarai decided to return to their capital by way of Gauhati so as to join their

^{*}DRV, V.V., 464-468.

naval force which was probably halting at Hajo. On the way back, the Koch soldiers subjugated Dimarua.¹¹¹ The chiefs of Dimarua claimed their descent from Naraka-Bhagadatta and Arimatta, the traditional rulers of ancient Assam.¹¹² The early history of this principality is not definitely known. But it is certain that when Naranarayan and Chilarai invaded Dimarua, its chief (*Raja*) was a Garo called Pantheswar.¹¹³ It is stated that he (also known as Santiswe) was previously a tributary of the Kacharis whose oppressive acts forced him to seek shelter of Naranarayan who made him his vassal and appointed him as a warden on the Jayantiya frontier.¹¹⁴ There is a reference that Naranarayan invaded Dimarua because its *Raja*, had stopped paying tributes to him.¹¹⁵ Naranarayan completely defeated the *Raja* and reconfirmed his overlordship compelling the latter to pay him annual tributes. This tributary status of the Dimarua *Raja* continued till the Mughal occupation of Koch-Hajo in 1612 A.D., when its *Raja* Mangal had accepted Ahom vassalage and fought against the Mughals on the Ahoms' behalf.¹¹⁶

The Koch forces thereafter halted at Raha where they built forts and embankments.¹¹⁷ The *Vamsavali* mentions that on his way back to Hajo, Naranarayan found that the Brahmaputra had a very curved course near Pandunath. He, therefore, ordered his soldiers to straighten its course by excavating its banks. According to Gait, since the branch of the Brahmaputra which flowed beyond Hajo had been found dried up in the winter as evidenced by the Persian chroniclers in 1636, it might be conjectured that "this was in consequence of the gradual enlargement of the channel cut by this king . . ."¹¹⁸

Conflict with Sulaiman Karrani of Bengal and the Tradition of Kalapahar in Assam

It has already been referred to how Sulaiman Karrani of Bengal maintained cordial relations with the Mughal Emperor Akbar from the very beginning of his rule. But he was also aware of the consequence of a supposed Mughal invasion. He, therefore, wanted to create a ring of feudatories and probably with that end in view invaded Orissa in A.D. 1567 and defeated its ruler Mukundadeva Harichandra (A.D. 1560-1567).¹¹⁹ At the same time, he was observing the growing power of the

Koches under Naranarayan immediately to the east of his kingdom, which might also pose a threat to him. Sulaiman, therefore, took the better advantage of time by deciding to play an offensive than to wait for a defensive role in future. As a result, Naranarayan who till then did not try to rouse the 'latent spirit of hostility' of the Afghans in order to avoid the 'great pains' from them, had now to face a tremendous attack from Sulaiman early in A.D. 1568.

Although Sulaiman's playing the offensive, as stated, was more probable, opinions differ as to who was the aggressor. According to the *Riyaz-us-Salat* Sulaiman took the offensive.¹²⁰ The *Akbarnama* also records the event in the same strain. The Koch chronicle, on the other hand, states that on account of the destruction caused by the Muslims to his kingdom, Naranarayan took the offensive.¹²¹ The *Kamrupar Buranji* also makes Naranarayan the aggressor.¹²² Relying on these sources Khan Chowdhury and Gait, and following them a number of historians suppose that Naranarayan took the offensive.¹²³ But on a careful examination it is found that the Koch king played only the defensive. Khan Chowdhury also seems to contradict his own conclusion when he states that it "does not appear that any resistance was offered to Kalapahar on behalf of Maharaja Naranarayan . . ."¹²⁴ by which he wants to say that it was Sulaiman Karrani and not Naranarayan who was the aggressor. This author wants to justify his contention by placing Kalapahar's campaigns against the Koches in A.D. 1553¹²⁵ but pulling back the conflict between the Sultan of Gaur and Naranarayan later than A.D. 1563.¹²⁶ But on the basis of the *Riyaz-us-Salat* and the *Akbarnama* and on a study of the contemporary political conditions as stated earlier it can be surmised that Sulaiman Karrani whose general was Kalapahar, invaded Assam not in A.D. 1553 or A.D. 1563, but in A.D. 1568; and that the offensive was played not by the Koch king Naranarayan but by Sulaiman Karrani, the Sultan of Bengal.

It was not possible for Naranarayan to take the aggressive against the ruler of Bengal at a time hard for him in several ways. He had invested a large amount of money and materials in his eastern campaigns and his soldiers also were tired of protracted conflicts. Although he had now only one way for expansion, namely towards the west and south-west which

was to be at the cost of the newly grown Afghan power of Bengal, yet, the Afghan leader Sulaiman was not the one to be easily dealt with; and Naranarayan would have to be fully equipped before entering into any clash with him. Moreover the Koch king was, as stated in the *Vamsavali*, at that time under the influence of the evil star; such belief in astrological calculations desisted the medieval Assam rulers, including the Koches and the Ahoms from undertaking any auspicious or risky enterprise. It is interesting to note that the chronicler of the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* makes Naranarayan to suspend the rebuilding of the temple of Kamakhya on the pretext of his being under the influence of evil stars, whereas he depicts him as playing the aggressor against a mighty enemy under the same circumstances. As a writer in the *Journal of the Assam Research Society* points out, the "author of the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* was an astrologer by caste, and he knew his art well. He had to find an explanation as to why Naranarayan . . . when he was too superstitious to undertake the repair of a temple was foolishly bold enough to wage a war with a new enemy knowing fully well as a simple truth of astrology that the influence of Saturn lasted 12 years".¹²⁷ Thus at a time when Naranarayan was repairing the material losses of his kingdom and had decided not to undertake any serious expedition owing to the influence of the Saturn, Sulaiman Karrani, a master of diplomacy, led his aggressive arms against the growing Koch kingdom.

The next problem is the date of this expedition, as local traditions associate Kalapahar, a general of Sulaiman Karrani, with iconoclastic activities in this land. The *Kamakhya Temple Inscription* (the temple is said to have been rebuilt due to its destruction caused by Kalapahar) bears the date *Saka* 1487¹²⁸ (A.D. 1565) by which time its renovation was complete. The repairing definitely started some years before this date, as the temple was found by the Koch king almost in ruins. This indicates that if there was any invasion by Kalapahar causing destruction of the temple, this had happened certainly before A.D. 1565. The *Riyaz-us-Salat* puts the date on A.D. 1568.¹²⁹ Under such circumstances if we accept the local tradition that Kalapahar destroyed the temples of Kamakhya and of Hayagriva Madhava, then the date of the invasion will have

to be placed much earlier than A.D. 1565, which, however, is not possible; or we are to reject the tradition of Kalapahar's (general of Sulaiman Karrani) invasion altogether. While in consideration of the contemporary political circumstances, we cannot doubt the authenticity of the date as given by the Persian chronicle, the date of the Kamakhya Temple Inscription is also undoubtable. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to ascertain Kalapahar the iconoclast, as the general of Sulaiman Karrani, whose rule started from only A.D. 1565. The *Vamsavali* gives us clues to the solution of the problem here, according to which the temple was destroyed by the Yavanas or the Bangals,^{129a} but nowhere it speaks of Kalapahar. On the other hand, the *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, in connection with Sulaiman's expedition to the Kock kingdom, simply mentions that he had subjugated the outlying parts and was beseiging the capital and as soon as he heard of an insurrection in Orissa, had abandoned the siege.^{129b} This definitely shows that Sulaiman had advanced only up to the extent of Koch Behar, and not as far as Tezpur as observed by Gait and others.¹³⁰ The *Akbarnama* mentions that Sulaiman had to return from Koch Behar without achieving success.¹³¹ This would certainly corroborate the contention that without farther approach, Sulaiman's general Kalapahar had returned from Koch Behar on hearing of some sort of trouble in Orissa.

From the above it is clear that the general Kalapahar, invading Koch Behar in A.D. 1568, was not the traditional Kalapahar held responsible for his iconoclastic activities in Assam; and so, if the tradition has any bearing, that traditional Kalapahar must have been a different person. Then who was the Kalapahar who damaged the temples of Kamakhya and Hayagriva Madhava in Assam? In this connection we may refer to the *Riyaz-us-Salatin* as well as to an undated manuscript chronicle of Bengal which credits Hussain Shah (1493-1519) with the conquest of Orissa.¹³² The biographer of Chaitanyadeva also refers to the destruction of many temples of the State by the Muslims during this campaign.¹³³ Here we may add that Hussain Shah's conquest of Kamata in A.D. 1498 which was "popularly believed to have been instigated by

Nilambar's Brahmin minister whose licentious son had been brutally murdered by the *Raja*,¹³⁴ not only resulted in the occupation of that kingdom as far as Hajo by the Muslims, but in destroying the city and spreading Muslim religion as well.¹³⁵ If the traditional Kalapahar, *alias* Raju is believed to have been a Brahmin by blood who had converted himself into Islam¹³⁶ and if Hussain Shah's iconoclastic activities in Orissa and in the kingdom of Kamata, as stated above, can be relied upon, the story of Nilambar's Brahmin minister and his instigating Hussain Shah to invade Kamata followed by some devastating activities of the Muslims might have some bearing on the traditions current in Assam of an iconoclast Brahmin renegade Kalapahar who demolished the temples of Kamakhya and Hayagriva Madhava possibly several years before A.D. 1565. In that case we can identify Kalapahar with Sachipatra, the Brahmin minister of the Kamata king Nilambar (c. 1490-1498) who made his escape to Bengal and instigated Hussain Shah to take up arms against the Kamata king. If this can be accepted, the date of the *Kamakhya Temple Inscription* (A.D. 1565) and that of the *Riyaz-us-Salatin* would be reconciled. This also explains the statement of the Koch chronicle that Biswa Singha got the image of goddess Kamakhya lying amidst jungles;¹³⁷ and therefore, it is very probable that Naranarayan laid the superstructure upon the foundation of the temple started by Biswa Singha.

Thus the tradition of Kalapahar's (Sulaiman's general) Assam campaign resulting in the destruction of the Hindu temples of the state is not supported by historical facts. It is true that Sulaiman Karrani, whose general Kalapahar, was responsible to the extent of destroying the temple in Orissa and invading Koch Behar to the extent of besieging its capital alone; and that too in A.D. 1568. The encounter between the two rulers might have been a terrible one;¹³⁸ but with no permanent effects. The destruction of the Kamakhya temple was accomplished long before 1568; and if the term 'Kalapahar' stands for a man of destructive career (or Black Mountain),¹³⁹ the traditional Kalapahar might be a different one, whom we have identified with the last Khen king Nilambar's Brahmin minister who accepted Islam and joined Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah's force. In no case he was the general of Sulaiman

Karrani whose invasion of Koch Behar took place in A.D. 1568 and whose military exploits were primarily motivated by the Bengal Sultan's imperialistic designs and not by religious bigotry.

The invasion of the Bengal Sultan, however, taught Naranarayan and Chilarai a good lesson. The former scarcely managed his escape from the battlefield, and the latter was captured alive and was brought to Gaur.¹⁴⁰ This was thus the first serious defeat that the Koches, met with. But this imprisonment of Chilarai was shortlived. The *Vamsavali* mentions an interesting incident as to how Chilarai had, by enunciating *mantras* recovered the Sultan's mother from her imminent death due to snake-bite.¹⁴¹ It further records that being pleased, the *Patsha* not only released Chilarai, but also gave his daughter in marriage to him along with the five districts of Bahirbandh, Bhitabandh, Gayabari, Serpur and Daskaunia as dowry.¹⁴² But Chilarai, a born military genius was not the man to forget this humiliating defeat. Not long afterwards, he formed a coalition with Akbar and invaded Bengal and defeated its *Patsha*.

Second Phase of Koch-Ahom Relations—Post-1568 Period

The Koch-Afghan conflicts resulting in the defeat of the former, had brought about a new phase in the Koch-Ahom relations. The Assamese *Buranjis* record that Chilarai wrote a letter from his place of imprisonment in Gaur to Naranarayan asking him to release the Ahom hostages and other prisoners taken from the Ahom kingdom after their victorious campaign in A.D. 1563.¹⁴³ It is possible that in context of the hostile relationships of the Koches with the Ahoms on one hand, and his own imprisonment at Gaur on the other, Chilarai suspected that the Ahom king would take advantage of this situation and invade their territory. Naranarayan who smelt an impending danger in the contents of the letter, spent no time in releasing the Ahom hostages and other prisoners. He also sent with them some sculptors and artisans whom the Ahom king established by the side of the Namdang river in the present Sibsagar subdivision. This place is still known as 'Bhatiyapar'¹⁴⁴ as the

lower Brahmaputra valley or the countries to the west of it were called *Bhati*. This was after A.D. 1568.

It has been mentioned earlier that the Koches after their victory over the Ahoms in A.D. 1563, occupied the territory to the north of the Brahmaputra as far east as the Suvansiri. But their hold over this area did not last long; soon the Ahom king Sukhampha *alias* Khora Raja (1552-1603) recovered his lost territories by dismissing the Koch officers appointed by Chilarai and resuming the administration to his own hands. As a result, unfriendly relations recurred and the Koches had to lead two naval expeditions, one in 1564 and the other in 1570 to reassert their authority, but these were successfully repulsed by the Ahoms. The latter also captured a Koch military officer named Mohan (*Laskar*) as well as a number of materials from the Koches. In 1577 some Koch rebels were given asylum by the Ahom king Sukhampha.¹⁴⁵ The Koches, who meanwhile suffered a defeat at the hands of the Afghans of Bengal, and got nervous at the gradual extension of the Mughal power towards the east, had decided to avoid a clash with the Ahoms and therefore remained indifferent to their affairs, and this state continued until the Mughal intervention in Koch politics.

Relations with the Mughals

According to the Koch chronicle, emperor Akbar addressed a letter to Naranarayan seeking his help and friendship to fight the Afghans.¹⁴⁶ In this letter he is also said to have proposed a division of Bengal between them after its subjugation.¹⁴⁷ It is further recorded that Naranarayan not only accepted the proposal of a friendly alliance, but also prepared to assume offensive from the east and sent letters to Akbar communicating of his plan. According to the Koch chronicle, the forces of both the rulers then invaded Bengal, Akbar from the west and Naranarayan from the east; and the combined army defeated the *Patsha*, occupied Bengal and then divided it between themselves.¹⁴⁸

The above mentioned events are, however, recorded in a different form in the *Akbarnama*, which states that king Naranarayan had begun friendly overtures by writing a letter

to the Mughal emperor. The chronicle further states that *Rajah* Mal Gosai (Naranarayan) had again made his submission to Akbar with valuable presents from his country.¹⁴⁹ Abul Fazl, the author of the *Akbarnama*, not only makes Naranarayan 'a zamindar of Koc' but also refers to this event as a recurrence of what had already happened. While the chronicler's impression of Naranarayan is another subject of discussion, the chronological sequence of the events is also to be noted. It may be recalled that Daud Karrani openly challenged the Mughal authority, and since 1574, Bengal became the citadel of the Afghan fugitives and other princelets of Bengal and Bihar. In 1574, after the war with Daud, a number of such chiefs specially the Mankalis, had been seeking refuge in the neighbouring regions.¹⁵⁰ This was, however, contradictory to Akbar's forward march towards the east. Later, chiefs like Mahmud Khan Khaskhail and Jamshid Khaskhail in Satgaon under Isa Khan, the rebellious Afghan chief of East Bengal, had proved unsurmountable obstacles on their way.¹⁵¹ So, in order to have a complete control over these rebellious chiefs, an effective blockade from the east to where they repeatedly ran for shelter, was an urgent necessity for Akbar.

It is, however, possible that the initiative in this regard was taken by Naranarayan himself, for he felt an urgent necessity of recovering his lost prestige after his defeat at the hands of the *Patsha* of Gaur in A.D. 1568;¹⁵² and this urgency to have an alliance with the Mughals, at a time when the Ahoms in the east had in the mean time shaken off the Koch vassalage, found expression as early as 1574 when Naranarayan refused asylum to the Afghan and the Mankali rebels of Ghoraghat.¹⁵³ As stated by S.N. Bhattacharyya, to "make his friendly move all the more cordial, he also sent an envoy with some presents to Akbar".¹⁵⁴ This was surely after 1568 and before 1575. It is possible that after thus beginning his relations with Akbar, who had also reciprocated to this, Naranarayan and Akbar prepared for a simultaneous attack upon Daud, the former deciding to proceed from the east and the latter from the west. We may, therefore, suppose that formal relations between Naranarayan and Akbar had taken place definitely before 1576, by which date Daud was defeated and killed

possibly by the combined forces of the Koches and the Mughals.

Both the Koch chronicle and the *Akbarnama* refer to the continuance of this relation even after 1576. The latter work, as elsewhere stated, therefore records that in 1578 Naranarayan sent a formal embassy to Akbar's court with valuable presents including 54 elephants.¹⁵⁵ It seems that emperor Akbar had been highly pleased with such ambassadorial communications, for in the said work Naranarayan's qualities have been highly praised and there is no indication of treating Naranarayan as a vassal of the Mughal emperor.

It, therefore, seems that the relations between the two rulers were established as a result of their reciprocal longings and it was based on equal terms.¹⁵⁶ The alliance was both offensive and defensive in nature. As we have already stated, in his campaign against Daud in 1575-1576, Akbar's army was certainly aided by the Koches. Abul Fazl's remark about the Koch king as a 'zamindar of Koc' was motivated by the idea of raising his patron king always above others.

The result of the alliance was more fruitful to the Mughals than to the Koches. It not only gave an advantage to the Mughals to hold their sway over Bengal but later after the death of Naranarayan enabled them to intrude into Koch politics. Naranarayan on his part continued to honour the terms of the alliance and accordingly in 1583, he sent his naval force to aid the Mughals against Masum Khan Kabuli, the rebellious Mughal officer in Tanda who was defeated on the Ganges and forced to flee.¹⁵⁷ Again on the strength of this friendly relations, Naranarayan's son and successor Lakshminarayan sought Mughal help by offering his submission to Akbar to fight his cousin Raghudev and his successor Parikshitnarayan. The Mughals who were always in search of opportunities to materialise their imperialistic designs in north-eastern India took it as an advantage, and as we shall see, this event led not only to the establishment of Mughal suzerainty over Koch Behar, the western Koch kingdom, but also to the annexation of Koch Hajo, the eastern one.

Extent of Naranarayan's Kingdom

Naranarayan's sovereignty at the zenith of his power

extended to the major part of north-eastern India. H.N. Choudhury writing in the beginning of this century observes that his conquests comprised "almost the whole of Northern Bengal, Bhutan and Assam as well as the modern States of Kachar, Jaintia, Manipur and Tipperah, and extended upto the coast of the Bay of Bengal".¹⁵⁸ The territory under his direct administration was, however, much smaller than that. According to the *Akbarnama*, the western boundary of Naranarayan's kingdom touched the Mughal dominion at Tirhut.¹⁵⁹ As such it extended beyond the river Karatoya which then used to flow through the districts of Rangpur and Bogra.* The same source further informs us that the kingdom of Koch Behar extended in the south as far as Ghoraghat.¹⁶⁰ It is to be noted that the five districts including Bahirbandh and Bhitirbandh on both banks of the Brahmaputra became a part of the Koch kingdom as a result of the relationship established between Chilarai and the Sultan of Gaur. Stephen Cacella, a Portuguese traveller, who visited Koch Behar after it got partitioned, had stated that the farthest limit of the Koch country (*i.e.*, the western Koch kingdom) to the north was Renate (Rangamati Joygaon).¹⁶¹ Kathalbari, a place in the extreme north-west, formed another frontier post of the kingdom.¹⁶² According to the *Akbarnama*, the Koch kingdom directly to the north, touched lower Tibet.¹⁶³ This shows that the line ran through lower Himalayan region covering the Bhutan border as far as Rangamati (Joygaon) and Kathalbari in the north-west.

As we have previously seen, Naranarayan did not annex most of the conquered territories and allowed the defeated rulers to enjoy their autonomy by paying annual tributes. As such the territories, directly administered by him, extended from Tirhut in the west to Narayanpur on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in the east where he had a military outpost established and connected it with his capital at Koch Behar by means of a road called *Gosain Kamal Ali* to which reference has already been made. On the south of the Brahmaputra, Naranarayan's direct sovereignty extended up to the river Kalang.

*It is a dried river now.

It will, therefore, have to be admitted that the conquests of Naranarayan were based more on military feats than on territorial extension followed by fruitful consolidation. So long the military strength of the Koches stood as democle's sword over the feudatories, they kept the terms of agreements. But no sooner Chilarai suffered a defeat at Bengal then they shook off the vassalage and stopped paying tributes. The Ahom king even dismissed the Koch officers and appointed his own instead. The political sovereignty of Naranarayan extended at least for a short while to the whole of the Brahmaputra valley up to Sadiya on the east, and on the south-east it spread as far as Manipur. Although apparently "the net result of this expedition does not appear to have been nothing more than a lip-deep acknowledgement of political vassalage and a hollow promise of payment of tribute on the part of the defeated chiefs and as such seems hardly commensurate with the time, energy and resources spent thereon,"¹⁶⁴ yet, it had some cultural impact at least in case of Assam and Kachar and helped in the process of cultural assimilation in the north-east.

REFERENCES

1. *Supra*, pp. 50f.
2. ABHB, p. 31.
3. DRV, vv 290-293.
4. *Ibid.*, v. 296.
5. *Ibid.*, v. 302; ABHB, p. 31.
6. See Plate No. v. In a letter of Bishnunarayan of Darrang he is referred to as *Sri Naranarayan*, see letter No. 39, PBPSS, pp. 49f. A second seal with the figure of a lion, called *Singha Chap* was also issued to be used in special state affairs, see, HCGh, p. 127.
7. Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, Vol. VI, Allahabad, 1964, p. 591; H. Beveridge (tr.), *Akbarnama*, Vol. III, New Delhi, 1973, p. 1067.
8. In an Assamese chronicle Chilarai is also called as *Malsuka*. It is possible that the chronicler without distinguishing Malladeva and Sukladhvaj, combined both the names to mean Chilarai alone. See, H. Barbarua; *Ahomar Din*, Gauhati, 1981, p. 68. He is also called 'Nunu' in the *Katha Guru Carita*, p. 236.
9. DRV, v. 340.
10. ABGB, p. 47.
11. HAG, p. 131.

12. P.N. Gohain Barooah, *Asamar Buranji*, Gauhati, 1976, p. 131.
13. *HCGh*, p. 170.
14. E.H. Stapleton, 'Contributions to the History and Ethnology of North-East India', *JASB*, Vol. VI, p. 154; Gait, 'Notes on some coins of the Koch kings', *JASB*, Vol. LXIV, 1895, Part I, No. III, p. 238.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 154; *Ibid.*, p. 241.
16. See Plate No. VI.
17. HBS, II, p. 179.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 179f.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Akbarnama*, III, pp. 254f.
22. MNEFPB, p. 78.
23. *Supra*, p. 57.
24. DRV, v. 318; KB, pp. 11f; ABSMJC, p. 11; S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Satsari Asam Buranji*, Gauhati University, 1969, p. 71 (henceforth, SAB).
25. DRV, v. 319.
26. ABSMJC, pp. 25 and 29.
27. For their respective assignments, *Supra*, p. 51. These two metals were usually imported to Assam from China and Bhutan.
28. ABSMJC, p. 25.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
30. *Ibid.*
31. DAB, p. 41; AB, pp. 79f.
32. AB, p. 80.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, ABSMJC, p. 25.
37. It is stated that because of the piling up of the heads (matha), the place came to be known as such. See, ABSMJC, p. 25.
38. AB, p. 80; DAB, p. 42.
39. Historical Letters of the Ahom Period, a collection of 44 letters exchanged between the Koch and the Ahom kings, Transcript No. 18, Vol. V, Part VI, DHAS, Gauhati (henceforth abbreviated as Transcript No. 18).
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. This statement of the envoys, however, did not fit well in context of the Koch-Ahom relations since 1546.
43. ABSMJC, p. 29.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 30; Transcript No. 18.

46. Transcript No. 18.
47. ABSMJC, p. 30.
48. DRV, v. 322; The *Vamsavali* states that the road was constructed as far as the Parasukunda (v. 321) which, however, does not appear possible. In fact, it was built up to Narayanpur in the present Lakhimpur district, KB, p. 12. According to Gait (HAG, p. 53), the road was built during the campaigns of 1546-1547. But his view is not acceptable in context of our analysis. The remains of the road are still in extant. Its length was about 350 miles.
49. ABSMJC, p. 38.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
51. See *Supra*, pp. 62ff.
52. ABSMJC, p. 32.
53. Although, the earliest reference in the *Buranjis*, to the Daflas in connection with the Ahoms are found in the days of the Ahom king Susengpha *alias* Pratap Singha (1603-1639), DAB, p. 59; ABSMJC, p. 32. It may be presumed from what have been recorded in the *Buranjis* that there were frequent clashes between the Daflas and the Ahoms.
54. ABSMJC, p. 32.
55. DRV, vv. 326-328.
56. The place subsequently came to be known as *Baradala*. DRV, v. 330.
57. ABSMJC, p. 32.
58. *Supra*, fn. 9.
59. DRV, v. 373.
60. AB, p. 85.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*
63. DAB, p. 61.
64. ABSMJC, p. 32.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
66. AB, p. 86; DAB, pp. 45f.
67. The place is called *Mechagarh* or *Mechaghar* from the bent (*mecha*) roof of the camp house that Chilarai built there. It is also said that the Koches excavated a tank there which came to be known as *Mechagarh Pukhuri*. The present *Mechagarh Pukhuri* was, however, not excavated by Chilarai. It was done by Pratap Singha. Perhaps the tank dug by Chilarai was not very deep and dried up in course of time. ABSMJC, p. 39.
68. DAB, p. 46; AB, p. 87.
69. DAB, p. 46f.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 47; AB, p. 87.
71. It is recorded that Nangbakla Gabharu, daughter of Suhungmung Dihingia Raja and wife of Thaomunglung Bargohain, refused to send her son as a hostage to the Koch king. She said, "I won't allow my son to be sent to the Koch country. Tell the king what

he and the ministers are when they have yielded to the enemies." She further said to her husband, "Let me have your head dress, girdle, belt and sword. Though I am a woman, I shall fight with the Koch king and let him know, how a woman can fight with a man. Who can give my son? If the course of the Dikhow river can be diverted upwards to the hill by putting a dam across, then only my son may be given," King Sukhampha then sent Chao Sugam, his brother to the Koch king instead of her son.—AB, p. 87; DAB, pp. 48f.

72. HAG, p. 58; HCGh, p. 138.
73. DAB, p. 48.
74. ABSMJC, p. 33.
75. *Ibid.*, PAB, p. 51.
76. AB, p. 87; AAAW, p. 205; J.N. Bhattacharyya, *Koch Rajar Buranji* Ms. (henceforth abbreviated as KRB), preserved at the DHAS, Assam, Gauhati, pp. 13f, states that Chilarai took with him the two noted court scholars Pitambar Siddhanta Vagish and Purushottam Vidyavagish from the Ahom kingdom.
77. AB, p. 88.
78. SAB, p. 72.
79. HAG, p. 300.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
81. J.B. Bhattacharyee, *Kachar under British Rule in North East India*, Delhi, 1979, p. 4.
82. DRV, v. 400; R.M. Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, Gauhati, 1978, p. 73.
83. J.B. Bhattacharyee, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 8; HCGh, p. 139.
85. HAG, p. 303.
86. J.B. Bhattacharyee, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
87. DRV, vv. 450-406.
88. R.M. Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
89. DRV, vv. 412-413.
90. HAG, p. 313.
91. DRV, v. 416.
92. *Ibid.*, v. 417.
93. *Ibid.*, vv. 419-420.
94. The legend of such a Jayantiya coin runs as follows:
Obverse : *Sri Sri Jayanti Pura—Purandarasya Sake 1592*
Reverse : *Sri Sri Siva Carana Kamala Madhukarasya.*
The scripts are Assamese and the language is Sanskrit. See Plate No. VII; also see A.W. Botham, *Catalogue of the Provincial Coin Cabinet*, Assam, Allahabad, 1930, p. 544; H.E. Stapleton, *loc. cit.*, p. 154.
95. DRV, v. 424; PAB, p. 51.
96. A. C. Choudhury, *Srihatter Itibritta*, Sylhet, 1317 B. S., p. 204, n. 7, cited in Bhattacharjee, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

- 96a. R. C. Majumdar (ed), *History and Culture of Indian People*—The Delhi Sultanate, Vol. VI, Bombay, 1967 (Reprint), p. 209.
97. N.R. Raychoudhury, *Tripura through the Ages*, Agartala, 1977, pp. 27f.
98. *Ibid.*, pp. 30ff.
99. DRV, v. 426.
100. *Ibid.*, v. 428.
101. *Ibid.*, v. 431.
102. HAG, p. 54.
103. KB, p. 12; DAB, p. 51.
104. HAG, p. 54.
105. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed) *Jayantiya Buranji*, Gauhati, 1964, p. (intro) xiv.
106. It is recorded that the chief resided at Nokshee and his palace was beside the Barapani river on a hill, *Ibid.*, p. (Intro) xiv.
107. HBS, II, p. 183.
108. DRV, vv. 475-477.
109. *Ibid.*, v. 478.
110. *Ibid.*, vv. 485-487.
111. *Ibid.*, v. 445.
112. HAG, p. 55. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* states that they claimed descent from Mrigakanka, DRV, v. 444. It is possible that this Mrigakanka was no other than the Kamata ruler, Mriganka of 15th century.
113. HAG, p. 55.
114. *Ibid.*, p. 55; H. Barbaruah, *op. cit.*, p. 93. According to Gait, the total population of Pantheswar's dominion was 18,000. HAG, p. 111.
115. H. Barbarua, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 93; Chakradhvaj, the successor of Pantheswar and the later Dimarua chiefs paid tributes to Raghudev and Parikshit-narayan, HAG, p. 111.
117. DRV, v. 452.
118. HAG, p. 61.
119. HBS, II, p. 183.
120. *Riyaz*, p. 152; *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1068; The *Riyaz-us-Salatin* (p. 152) states that Sulaiman "himself set out for the conquest of the country of Kuch Behar. He had subjugated its environs and out-lying parts and whilst he was besieging its capital he got of an insurrection in Orissa, and so abandoned the siege."
121. DRV, vv. 495-496.
122. KB, p. 12.
123. HAG, p. 55; N. N. Acharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 203; EHKB, p. 197; HCGh, p. 143.
124. HCGh, p. 129.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

127. R. M. Nath, 'Kalapahar and the Kamakhya Temple', *Journal of Assam Research Society*, Vol. IV, July 1936, No. 2, p. 43.
128. See Appendix D.
129. Riyaz, p. 152.
- 129a. DRV, vv. 514, 542.
- 129b. Riyaz, p. 152.
130. HAG, p. 55; HBS, II, p. 184. Gunabhiram Baruah states that Kalapahar returned from Gauhati by boat. ABGB, p. 44.
131. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1068. It states that the "ruler of Koch did not pay his respect to the *Hakim* of Bengal, and Sulaiman Karrani proceeded to make war upon him and returned upon failure."
132. HBS, II, p. 148.
133. *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, cf. HBS, II, p. 148fn.
134. HBS, II, p. 146.
135. See HCGh, p. 175.
136. D. C. Sanyal (compiled), *Bangalar Samajik Itihas*, Calcutta, Bangla, 1317, pp. 88ff.
137. See, *Supra*, p. 66.
138. DRV, vv. 496-503; ABGB, p. 129; PAB, p. 67.
139. HBS, II, p. 178; Iswari Prasad, *Medieval India*, Allahabad, 1970, p. 488.
140. DRV, vv. 503-507.
141. *Ibid.*, v. 528.
142. HAG, p. 56; ABSMJC, p. 35, states that the mother of the Sultan declared the river Karatoya as the (western) boundary of the Koch kingdom. The statement of Wade that the whole territory of Gaur was annexed by Naranarayan, (AAAW, p. 205), does not appear to have any base at all.
143. ABSMJC, p. 37; ABHB, p. 35. It is said that Chilarai also suggested Naranarayan to offer the hand of a Koch princess to the Ahom king. ABSMJC, pp. 37f.
144. ABHB, p. 36; ABS, p. 24.
145. DAB, p. 50; HAG, p. 104.
146. DRV, vv. 565-568.
147. *Ibid.*, v. 568.
148. *Ibid.*, vv. 582-584.
149. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 349.
150. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
151. MNEFPB, pp. 99f.
152. According to S. N. Bhattacharyya "Notwithstanding the weak political position of Akbar in Bengal, his Imperial status, vigorous personality, unbounded ambition and brilliant military exploits. dazzled by the eyes of his Koch neighbour and bred in him a natural sense of inferiority and alarm." *Ibid.*, p. 102.
153. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
154. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
155. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 349.

156. Naranarayan is not referred to in the *Akbarnama* as personally going to Delhi to meet Akbar. His position was not that of a subordinate ruler as supposed by some writers like Stewart who states that "Khan Jahan . . . compelled the *Raja* of Cooch Behar to pay tribute and to acknowledge himself as vassal of the empire." *History of Bengal*, Delhi, Reprint, 1971, p. 106. In fact Naranarayan "did not personally wait upon Akbar, but simply sent him an envoy, with an adulatory letter containing professions of friendship and good will, besides some presents . . .". MNEFPB, p. 98fn.
157. *Akbarnama*, III, pp. 620f; MNEFPB, p. 103fn.
158. H. N. Choudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and Its Land Revenue Settlement*, Cooch Behar, 1903, p. 232 (henceforth abbreviated as CSLSC).
159. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1067.
160. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1067.
161. C. Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia*, The Hague, 1924, p. 122.
162. MNEFPB, p. 96 fn.
163. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1067.
164. MNEFPB, p. 77f.

Disintegration of the Kingdom: Raghudev and Parikshitnarayan

The hey day of the Koch kingdom under the rule of Naranarayan did not last long. Disintegration soon set in following the death of Chilarai. Even Naranarayan failing to resist it, had to accept the partition of the kingdom as a *fait accompli*. This partition greatly weakened the power of the Koches and led to the intervention of foreign elements in their internal affairs which subsequently resulted in the western kingdom's losing its independence, and the eastern kingdom getting annexed to the Mughal empire.

Circumstances leading to the Partition of the Kingdom

The circumstances which led to the division of the Koch kingdom are interesting. The *Akbarnama*¹ states that Naranarayan married much late in life and that too on the request of his brother Chilarai. He had therefore, no son till his old age. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* mentions that although Naranarayan married earlier, he remained childless till late in life.² Therefore, Raghudev, son of Chilarai, had been selected as the heir apparent.³ However, when Lakshminarayan was born, he being the son of the ruling king, had greater claim to the throne according to the law of inheritance prevalent at that time. Raghudev therefore, suspected that at any moment he might be ousted by Lakshminarayan.⁴ Moreover, Raghudev was instigated by his kinsmen and some of his counsellors who feared that in case Lakshminarayan became king, they would be deprived of their power and privileges which they had been

enjoying since the days of Chilarai. They, therefore, suggested Raghudev to take a part of the kingdom for himself.⁵

But Raghudev did not dare an open revolt against his uncle, who was very kind to him and had not shown any inkling that his heirship would be superseded by that of Lakshminarayan. Raghudev, therefore, pretended that he would go for a hunting excursion along with a number of subordinate officers. The permission being granted, Raghudev immediately started with his followers which included officers like Yudhisthir Kayastha, the *Bhandari*, Kabindra Patra, Sri Rai Laskar, Purandar Laskar, Kaipur Giri, Sardar Kabiraj, Gadai Bar Kayastha, Gopal Chaulia, Gadadhar Chaulia and others.⁶ He proceeded towards the east and reached as far as the Manas river where he encamped at a place called Barnagar or Ghilajaypur.⁷ He then declared himself king there. Naranarayan persuaded to bring him back perhaps with a view to making a peaceful settlement but in vain. The only course of action now left for Naranarayan also, was the partition of the kingdom, for if he would depose Raghudev from *Patkunwarship*, a rebellion from the latter was but very natural. But the latter possibly feared punishment in the hands of Naranarayan because, after all, he committed a treason. Naranarayan, the peace loving king, however, did not take offence at Raghudev's conduct. On the other hand, he sent Raghu's queens, attendants and slaves to join him.⁸

Raghudev remained satisfied for some time. But he was an ambitious person and his eyes were fixed upon Bahirbandh, a fertile region within the kingdom of Naranarayan. He attacked this region which compelled Naranarayan to resort to arms against him. According to the *Padshah Buranji*, the conflict took place because Naranarayan demanded a tribute from Raghudev.⁹ This, however, appears doubtful because what is more probable is that Raghudev stopped paying tribute, at which Naranarayan declared war against him. Raghudev, who was possibly not prepared for such a course of action from his uncle resorted to a strategem, and sent his queens in the first row of the army to the battlefield to fight the soldiers of Naranarayan. This had the desired effect. Naranarayan withdrew from fighting and made a formal agreement with Raghudev, according to which, the kingdom of Koch Behar was divided into two parts with the river Sonkosh as the

boundary between them. Naranarayan and his descendants would be ruling in the western part and Raghudev and his descendants would be ruling in the eastern part. It was also agreed that Raghudev would be paying an annual tribute to Naranarayan and acknowledge his sovereignty.¹⁰

Date of the Division of the Kingdom

There is much controversy regarding the date of the division of the kingdom. According to Buchanon Hamilton, it was Biswa Singha who had bestowed the administration of the eastern kingdom upon Chilarai and that of the western upon Naranarayan,¹¹ whereas Babu Ramchandra Ghosh states that Naranarayan himself had conferred on Chilarai the charge of the territory to the east of the river Sonkosh.¹² Be that as it may, it was possibly for administrative convenience that such arrangement was made and no formal division of the kingdom to be governed by two separate royal houses of the same origin was made till the rebellion of Raghudev. Naranarayan appointed Chilarai to administer the eastern territory as a local governor only and not as an independent ruler. When Chilarai died, Naranarayan possibly did not make Raghudev the governor of that area at which the latter was offended and on the pretext mentioned above, went there and declared himself a ruler.

According to Gunabhiram Barua, this division of the Koch kingdom took place in *Saka* 1503 (A.D. 1581).¹³ Gait¹⁴ and following him Amanat-ullah Khan Choudhury also accept this date.¹⁵ The earliest record in this regard is the *Stone inscription of the Hayagriva Madhava temple* at Hajo which records that the temple was rebuilt by *Kameswara* Raghudev (*i.e.*, Raghudev, the king of Kamrup) in *Saka* 1505 (A.D. 1583).¹⁶ This shows that Raghudev became the ruler of Kamrup or Koch Hajo before A.D. 1583. Therefore, the event took place at least a year or two before the reconstruction of the temple which took a period of six months for its completion.¹⁷ This is also confirmed by the fact that Raghudev is said to have visited a number of religious places within his kingdom before his taking up of this work.¹⁸ Therefore, A.D. 1581 may be accepted as the exact time of the division of the kingdom.

Nomenclature of the Kingdom

The eastern division was known as 'Kamrup' in the local sources¹⁹ and as 'Koch Hajo' in the Persian chronicles.²⁰ The western division known as Koch Behar was called as 'Kuc' (Koch) or 'Koch Behar' in the Persian chronicles,* and simply as 'Behar' in the *Gurucaritas*.²¹ Other sources also have spelt these names differently. For example, the English traveller Ralph Fitch writing in A.D. 1586 refers to the western division as the country of 'Couche'.²² Stephen Cacella, the Portuguese traveller of the first quarter of the 17th century, also refers to this division as 'Cocho' but mentions its capital as 'Biaar' (Bihar).²³ Writing in the same century Vanden Brouck and an unnamed Dutch crew accompanying Mir Jumla in the expedition to Koch Behar and Assam in A.D. 1662-63 termed it as 'Cos-Bhaar' and 'Kos bia'²⁴ respectively and the latter referred to Koch Hajo simply as 'Azo'.²⁵ Stephen Cacella also spelt 'Hajo' as 'Azo'.²⁶ In the later period the different spellings of the term 'Bihar' as 'Behar', 'Biaar', 'Koch Bihar', 'Koch-Bihar' etc. Created some confusion amongst the British officers. To avoid this the British government, by a proclamation made in 1896, counter-signed by His Highness Maharaja Bhup Bahadur directed that henceforth the name of this country (*i.e.* western Koch country) would be spelt as 'Cooch Behar'.²⁷

As regards the origin of the term 'Behar' or 'Bihar' there is much controversy. According to the *Rajopakhyana* the place is called so because Jalpeswara Siva made his *vihas* or wanderings there.²⁸ According to another opinion the name originates from a Buddhist *vihara* (monastery), 'originally founded in a place called Bihar (in Patna) and gradually the vast surrounding areas came to be known as 'Bihar'.²⁹ Amanatullah Khan Choudhury supporting this view cites the examples of some other place-names like Chandikabehar and relating them to some Buddhist relics, states that, "indeed it may be inferred that 'Bihar' does imply the former existence of a Buddhist monastery."³⁰ It is a fact that the term 'Bihar' or

* *Akbarnama*, III, pp. 1067f; *Baharistan*, I, p. 222; *Blochmann*, *loc. cit.*, p. 53f.

'Behar' has a Sanskrit origin; but it is difficult to associate the name with a Buddhist monastery. The term 'Bihar' means 'to sport', 'to dwell' or 'to wander'; and therefore, 'Koch Bihar' means the sporting, wandering or dwelling place of the Koches. The *Yogini Tantra*³¹ calls the country of the Koches as 'Kochadesa' and states that here the descendants of Biswa Singha made sports (*biharanti*) with beautiful damsels (*deva-kanya*). This is also corroborated by a statement in the *Pithamala*³² where the land is called 'Kocha-bandhupura' (i.e., the land where the Koch women have their dwellings or sporting ground) where Jalpeswara Siva resides. It is to be noted here that sometime the term 'Koch Behar' is interpreted by the Koches as 'Nij-Behar', meaning one's own dwelling place.³³ It is therefore, possible that the term 'Bihar' has its origin in Sanskrit term '*Bihara*' meaning a dwelling, wandering or a sporting place.

The eastern division, Koch Hajo, included the territory extending from the Sonkosh to the Barnadi on the north of the Brahmaputra, and on the south it extended from the Brahmaputra in the west to the river Kalang in the present Nowgong district of Assam. It is possible that the term 'Hajo' originated from a Bodo word, 'Haju', meaning a hill,³⁴ which is related with the topographical features of the region. In the present Kamrup district of Assam, there is still a town called Hajo, a few miles north-west of the town of Gauhati where the famous temple of Hayagriva-Madhava is located. It appears that Hajo was a very important commercial centre during the period under study and as such a point of attraction to the foreigners. The local sources preferred to call the eastern Koch kingdom as Kamrup because it once housed the capital of the ancient glorious kingdom of Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa.

Naranarayan, however, did not long survive the division of the kingdom. He died in A.D. 1587 six years after this event. With his death the disintegration of the Koch kingdom speeded up which he had so carefully tried to avert. He was succeeded by his son Lakshminarayan during whose reign conflicts between the two kingdoms became rampant inviting intervention of the Mughals.

Estimate of Naranarayan

The death of Naranarayan signified the end of the glorious

period of Koch political history. With his brilliant military achievements, Naranarayan not only subjugated the neighbouring powers and made himself the master of the major part in the north east, but also brought about a friendly relation between him and the great Mughal emperor Akbar. This was not a small achievement specially when we consider that this alliance determined an important political status for the Koch kingdom in the contemporary political history of north-east India. Nay it was Naranarayan who made the Koches a power to be reckoned with in the political history of eastern India of the period.

Naranarayan had qualities of both head and heart and could wield the pen as well as the sword. The *Kamakhya Temple Inscription* speaks of this great king in the following words:

Glory to the king Malla Deva, who by virtue of his mercy, is kind to the people, who in archery is like Arjuna, and in charity like Dadhichi and Karna; versed in many *Sastras*; his character is excellent; in beauty he is as bright as Kandarpa, he is a worshipper of Kamakhya.³⁵

Again the *Stone Inscription of the Hayagriva-Madhava Temple* states that, "the most wise king Malla Deb, was the conqueror of all enemies. In gravity and liberality and for heroism he had a great reputation, and he was purified by religious deeds".³⁶

Contemporary literary sources also throw much light upon the character and personality of this great monarch. Even Sankaradeva in a *Raja-Bhatima*³⁷ states that Naranarayan was the jewel of his family (*nija kula kumuda prakasita*), grave and patient like the ocean (*pekshite sindhu*) and like Indra among his courtiers. Further, he was the conqueror of his enemies, a patron of scholars, pious like Yudhisthira, in pride he equalled Durjyodhana, and in physical traits he was comparable to none. His appearance resembled a blue lotus (*nila-padma*). In a colophon of the *Adi Vana Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, Ram Saraswati, the poet laureate, writes that Naranarayan who was incomparable with any other ruler, was also expert in all the *Sastras* and got assembled in his court numerous scholars from Gauda and Kamarupa.³⁸ In another context the poet calls him *Raja-Sirumani*³⁹ (King superior) and says that Naranarayan was

a friend to the honest and fire to the enemy.⁴⁰ The contemporary Persian sources also speak of the manifold qualities of this great king. The *Akbarnama*, for example, states that Naranarayan "possessed much enlightenment, and was adorned with excellent qualities".⁴¹

Undoubtedly this great king of the Koches left a lasting impact upon the history of this region of the country. A benevolent monarch, he was conscious of his duty to his people and by serving them in a proper way he could win their whole-hearted loyalty, and so during his time there was not a single internal rebellion except that of his nephew Raghudev and that too for his own personal interest. Although a patron of Aryan culture, Naranarayan did not disregard tribal customs and rites which did not stand on the way to developing his country. A humanist himself, his humane feelings were intensified by the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, and he came to be regarded as the most liberal and generous of the rulers of north-eastern India. He paid much attention to works of public welfare and caused a number of roads to be constructed (the most important being the *Gosain Kamal Ali*) and a number of tanks excavated. He encouraged agriculture and trade pursuits. The straightening of the course of the Brahmaputra near Hajo had not only helped in easy communication and transport, but also in getting the nearby lands irrigated. His humanitarian activities were confined not only to the human world, but like those of Asoka, the great Maurya emperor, they were extended even to the animal kingdom. This is clear from the account of Ralph Fitch who makes the following observation:

Here they (the people) all be Gentiles, and they will kill nothing. They have hospitals for sheep, goats, dogs, cats, birds and for all other living creatures. When they be old and lame, they keep them untill they die . . .⁴²

Himself a scholar, Naranarayan was a great patron of learning and literature. Indeed, his reign has rightly been termed as "the Elizabethan period of Assamese literature".⁴³ Besides Sankaradeva, the great Vaishnava reformer, who was also a literary genius, and Madhavadeva, his apostle, there were other literary figures like Ram Saraswati, Pitambar Siddhantavagish,

Bakul Kayastha, Purusottam Vidyavagish Bhattacharya and Sridhara Kandali. By encouraging syncretism of Aryan and non-Aryan culture, he "brought about the transformation of the Bodo speaking Koches into the Bengali and Assamese-speaking Rajbansis in course of a few generation".⁴⁴ He thus strengthened the ties between Assam and the rest of India particularly Bengal, and thus he has been rightly considered as the greatest link between these two countries (Assam and Bengal). By patronising the Neo-Vaishnavite movement Naranarayan not only made a splendid and lasting contribution to the religious life of Assam, but at the same time he served a great social cause, namely that of spreading moral and spiritual education among the masses. It was under his patronage that a number of *Sastra* institutions were established which soon became leading centres of learning and education. It will have to be admitted that without Naranarayan the history of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam would have been completely different, for it was under his patronage that the great religious reformer Sankaradeva could launch his all-pervading movement and bring about a reorganization of the society.

Although so keenly interested in cultural pursuits, Naranarayan excelled in administrative efficiencies as well. His policy of conquest also shows his keen foresight and his diplomatic dealings with the neighbouring powers are examples of his knowledge of state-craft. Indeed this great king of the Koches occupies a unique place in the history of the north-east India.

Contemporary Political Condition in Bengal

Naranarayan's son and successor Lakshminarayan inherited very few of the brilliant qualities of his father. Weak and indolent, he was totally unfit to guide the destiny of his kingdom against the imperialistic design of the Mughals and the territorial ambition of his cousin Raghudev. Meanwhile Bengal passed on to the hands of the Mughals after the defeat of Daud Khan Karrani in A.D. 1575 although the actual introduction of Mughal government there, was still far off. The local chiefs created much trouble to the Mughal authorities in Bengal.

When Munim Khan, general of Akbar who conquered Bengal, died in the last part of 1575, there was further confusion among the Mughal officers and many of them left Bengal. The new governor Hussain Quli Beg (1575-1578), also known as Khan-i-Jahan, came only to face the rebellious chiefs some of whom, including Daud, were subsequently killed. Khan-i-Jahan's death in December 1578, provided opportunities to other selfish officers to rise in rebellion in Bengal who put Muzaffar Khan (1578-1580), the successor of Hussain Quli Beg, to death and made their leader Babu Qaqshal the viceroy and Masum Khan Kabuli, the regent.⁴⁵ Thus Bengal again became off from Delhi. At this Akbar sent Khan-i-Azam as the governor in April 1582 who proved himself quite inefficient to tackle with the problems and was succeeded by Shahbaz Khan in May 1583. Both the governors spent their times in fighting the rebels like the Qaqshals of Ghoraghat and others like Masum Khan. Of course Shahbaz Khan could defeat Masum Khan in March 1585 in the battle of Trimohani,⁴⁶ but a number of other rebels still remained unsubdued. This political confusion continued till Man Singha's arrival as the governor of Bengal in May 1594. Man Singha now fought seriously against these half-subdued rebels who had been then taking shelter in the jungles of East Bengal. However, both Masum Khan and his ally the Afghan chief Isa Khan gave stiff resistance to the new governor, but failing to oppose him, entered into the jungles of Mymensingh beyond the reach of the imperial officers.

Thus when Akbar died, Bengal was a hot-bed of troubles to the Mughals, and Jahangir, son and successor of Akbar, had to deal with these rebels from the very beginning. As a result of such repeated warfare between the rebels and the Mughals, the former began gradually intruding to the neighbouring Koch regions. So, after the death of Naranarayan, the divided Koch kingdoms had to be engaged in warfare with these new enemies to maintain their existence. Such circumstances compelled the rulers of both the Koch kingdoms to seek help either from the Mughals or the Afghans or the Ahoms, as a result of which, the western Koch kingdom lost its independent status and the eastern its very existence.

Raghudev narayan

Raghudev or Raghudev narayan who established himself in about A.D. 1581 in the eastern Koch kingdom, took the title *Kameswara*.⁴⁷ He was, however, subordinate to Naranarayan and had to pay him all kinds of taxes and tributes. The *Vamsavali*, however, does not mention specifically about Raghudev's paying tribute to Naranarayan. According to an Assamese chronicle, the English translation of which is given by J.P. Wade, Raghudev had to agree that he would mint coins in the name of Naranarayan only.⁴⁸ But no such coins of Raghudev have yet come to light. The chronicle, however, states that Raghudev should transmit the horses and gold which Naranarayan used to receive from the Boxa Duars and also the *Pat-kapor* (silk cloth) from Baygher (Barnagar) in the usual manner to Koch Behar.⁴⁹ S.N. Bhattacharyya does not suppose that Raghudev narayan paid any kind of tribute to Naranarayan. According to him "in view of the peculiar circumstances under which Naranarayan was forced to concede to Raghu Deb a part of his dominion and thereby make the best of a bad bargain, the abject concessions alleged to have been made by the latter to the former—the really vanquished party, appears to be quite unnatural".⁵⁰ But Bhattacharyya's contention does not appear acceptable. Raghudev's eulogy of Naranarayan in his own inscriptions and the absence of any coin of him so long as Naranarayan continued to live,⁵¹ make it plausible that Raghudev was a tributary of Naranarayan. However, soon after the death of Naranarayan, Raghudev declared his independence and minted coins in his name which resulted in straining his relations with Lakshminarayan.

Relations with Lakshminarayan

Lakshminarayan having thus failed to keep Raghudev under control resolved to take other means to vanquish him. He began to instigate Parikshit narayan, the eldest son of Raghudev to kill his father in order to make the throne safe for him.⁵² The plot was discovered and all the traitors except Parikshit were hanged. Parikshit narayan somehow managed his escape

to Koch Behar, accompanied by two other persons, Gopal and Mathura and taking with him one hundred gold *mohars*.⁵³

This incident led Raghudev to declare war on Lakshminarayan and attack the Bahirbandh region.⁵⁴ The result was however, disastrous to Raghudev, who had to lose his royal umbrella, an insignia of the Koch royalty, to Lakshminarayan and acknowledge the overlordship of the latter.⁵⁵ It is also recorded that Lakshminarayan waged a war on Raghudev immediately after this reprisal, but failed to vanquish him,⁵⁶ which indicates that Raghudev tried to shake off this allegiance but neither could he succeed in realising his objectives nor Lakshminarayan succeeded in ousting him.

Raghudev and the Afghan Chief Isa Khan

“Encouraged, no doubt, by the dismemberment of the Koch dominions”, as well as by the strained relationship between the two kingdoms, Isa Khan invaded the territory of Raghudev lying south of the Brahmaputra.⁷⁵ Gait says that Raghudev endeavoured to resist the invaders in person, and occupied a fort where the village of Jangalbari in Mymensingh now stands. It was surrounded by a moat, but the defenders were not able to hold it against the vigorous onslaught of Isa Khan and his men.⁵⁸ Raghudev failed to offer an effective resistance and lost a considerable portion of his territory as far as Rangamati in the Goalpara district.⁵⁹ This event might have taken place a little before A.D. 1594.

The success of Isa Khan became a matter of concern to the imperial Mughals. Man Singha, the new governor of Bengal (1594-1606), therefore, led an organised campaign against Isa Khan in December 1595. The latter being unable to resist it retreated, leaving most of his territories to fall into the hands of the Mughals.⁶⁰ The defeat, however, did not dampen the spirit of Isa Khan or of other rebels, and in the period between July and September 1596, both he and Masum Khan Kabuli along with the Qaqshals of Ghoraghat advanced against the Mughals. Man Singh sent his son Himmat Singh to repulse them. The young commander completely defeated them and forced them to flee.⁶¹ Soon after this, Isa Khan entered into an alliance with Raghudev because he felt that the help of

the latter was of an urgent necessity to fight the Mughals. Raghudev was only too glad to accept the alliance as he calculated that with the help of the Afghan chiefs he would be able not only to vanquish Lakshminarayan, but also be able to recover his lost territories. Thus strengthened by this new alliance, Raghudev attacked on the Bahirbandh region of Lakshminarayan early in 1596.⁶² The *Akbarnama* records that Raghudev was helped in this campaign by his new ally Isa Khan.⁶³ Finding that he was unable to resist the invaders, Lakshminarayan appeared before the Bengal governor Man Singh, declared his submission to the Mughal authority and by giving him his daughter in marriage, sought his (Man Singh's) help against the new Koch-Afghan alliance.⁶⁴ Man Singh, who was much eager to suppress the rebellious Afghan chiefs, considered it as a god-sent opportunity and gladly agreed to help Lakshminarayan.⁶⁵ Thus an independent Koch kingdom founded against innumerable odds, now accepted the vassalage of the Mughals of its own accord, and with the submission of Lakshminarayan, the independent identity of the Koches was also lost for ever.

Defeat of Raghudev

Lakshminarayan's submission to the Mughals soon proved disastrous to Raghudev who suffered a serious defeat at the hands of the combined forces of the Mughals and Lakshminarayan on 3rd May 1597.⁶⁶ But as soon as the victorious imperial army retreated, Isa Khan again offered to help Raghudev and dispersed the Mughal force sent under Durjan Singh, son of Man Singh on 5th September 1597 killing its commander in the field. Both the army and the navy succumbed to defeat and some of them were taken as prisoners.⁶⁷ But soon after, the situation became reversed; Isa Khan let the prisoners free and submitted himself to Akbar,⁶⁸ probably fearing a renewed attack from the Mughals. At this Raghudev had to fight single-handed the combined forces of Lakshminarayan and the Mughals which he could not long continue. Thus isolated, Raghudev now searched for a new ally. In the mean time Isa Khan died in 1599 which event further demoralised Raghudev.

Relations with the Ahoms

At this situation Raghudev approached the Ahom king Susenpha alias Pratap Singha (A.D. 1603-1641) and by giving him his daughter Mangaldoi in marriage cemented an alliance with him.⁶⁹ One *Asam Buranji*⁷⁰ mentions that Raghudev feared that if Lakshminarayan establishes matrimonial relations with the Ahom king also, in that case he would have no way out but to submit to Lakshminarayan.⁷¹ But as Raghudev could come into friendly terms in time with Pratap Singha by a matrimonial tie, he felt his position secured against a possible menace from Lakshminarayan backed by the Mughals. According to S.N. Bhattacharyya, the "marriage alliance with the Ahom sovereign was a triumph of Raghu Deb's skilful diplomacy and wise statecraft. He now managed to kill two birds with one stone. The bug-bear of an attack on Kamrup from the east as well as from the west disappeared at once, and Raghu's political position was greatly strengthened".⁷² The Ahom king too gladly accepted the proposal because he was intelligent enough to understand the Mughal design of expanding towards the east. He, therefore, instead of pursuing an aggressive design towards the west, was eager to find out an ally there. So, when Raghudev approached for a friendly alliance, he found in the Koch ruler an effective blockade to Mughal territorial aggrandizement. The marriage took place in the latter part of 1602 or early part of 1603. Thus against the Koch-Mughal alliance formed by Lakshminarayan, a Koch-Ahom alliance was concluded by Raghudevnarayan, which had an important role to play in the history of Mughal policy in the north-east.

Death of Raghudev

Raghudev died soon after concluding the alliance with Pratap Singha. Gait has placed the date of his death in A.D. 1603.⁷³ According to Gunabhiram Baruah, Raghudev died in A.D. 1593.⁷⁴ This date is also found in the *Prasiddhanarayanar Vamsavali*.⁷⁵ The *Purani Asam Buranji*⁷⁶ states that a few days after the marriage between his daughter and the Ahom king

Pratap Singha, Raghudev died. The *Padishahnama* states that in the beginning of the reign of Jahangir (i.e., A.D. 1605), Koch Hajo was ruled by 'Parichat' (Parikshit).⁷⁷ That Raghudev was ruling till after A.D. 1597 can be proved by an inscription engraved on a gun belonging to him, dated *Saka* 1519 (A.D. 1597).⁷⁸ The marriage alliance with Pratap Singha (A.D. 1603-1641), who became king in 1603, and the evidence of the *Purani Asam Buranji* confirm that he died in the last part of 1603.

Gait suspects that Raghudev died from a snake-bite or of poison administered by the mother of Indranarayan,⁷⁹ which was occasioned by a court conspiracy. According to the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, Parikshit hatched a plot to assassinate his father with the aid of a monk coming from outside the kingdom, but in vain.⁸⁰ This shows that Raghudev might not die a natural death. In any case, there was every possibility of a court intrigue in which Raghudev was killed.

Raghudevnarayan was an ambitious ruler. His qualities are widely praised by the contemporary poets and scholars of the Koch kingdom. He well understood that both Lakshminarayan and he could not rule in a single kingdom. He therefore, established his independent position and maintained it against all odds. But his failure to maintain cordial relations with Lakshminarayan was taken advantage of by the Mughals and the Afghan chiefs, both of whom interfered in Koch politics (for which they had to pay heavily). Thus it was in "Raghu Deb's reign that the seed of future troubles was sown and that his overweening ambition and aggressive acts were really the dominant factors which occasioned Mughal intervention in Koch politics. . . . He thus may well be said to have sowed the wind while his unfortunate son and heir Parikshit Narayan, reaped the whirland".⁸¹

Raghudev was a Vaishnava by faith. He rebuilt the Haya-griva-Madhava temple at Hajo. He was a patron of literature and education as well.

Accession of Parikshitnarayan

The death of Raghudevnarayan witnessed another chapter of internal dissension and external aggression. Raghudev left

behind him eighteen sons,⁸² of whom Parikshitnarayan was the eldest and who was away from the capital at the time of his father's death. Taking advantage of his absence from the capital, the other sons attempted to get the throne for themselves.⁸³ Meanwhile, Parikshit arrived at the capital and a war of succession followed. This is evident from an Assamese chronicle which states that being defeated in a conflict with Parikshit, Mal Singha or Man Singha, a brother of the former, fled to the Ahom territory and sought shelter from the Ahom king Pratap Singha. The latter knowing that the prince was a 'kindred of the royal blood', established him at Namrup conferring on him the title *Raja*.⁸⁴ Another brother, Indranarayan, was assassinated by a Mech at the instigation of Parikshitnarayan.⁸⁵ This shows that the war of succession caused much bloodshed, and Parikshit who won, succeeded to his father's throne in A.D. 1603.

Transfer of the Capital

Hostility between Raghudev and Lakshminarayan, the latter's acceptance of the Mughal vassalage and the fear of a Mughal attack on his kingdom led Parikshit to shift his headquarters to a safer place. The place chosen was in the vicinity of the Asvakranta hill in north Gauhati. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, while giving the location of the new capital, states that it was in Pragjyotishpur.⁸⁶ Stephen Cacella, visiting Koch Hajo in 1626, states that Hajo was "the most important town and the capital of the kingdom of Cocho, a large country, very populous and rich."⁸⁷ But that was at the time when Hajo was made the headquarters of the Mughals after their annexation of Kamrup in 1912. Cacella was perhaps under the impression that Hajo was the headquarter of the former ruling dynasty as well. It was, therefore, north Gauhati, then called by the Koches as Pragjyotishpur, which was the new capital of Parikshitnarayan. It was far away from Barnagar which was within the easy reach of his enemies. Parikshit well fortified the new city, excavated tanks and built his palace there. It is recorded in the *Vamsavali* that he celebrated the occasion by performing Vedic rites.⁸⁸

Hostilities with Lakshminarayan backed by the Mughals

Parikshitnarayan then prepared to wage a war against Lakshminarayan who had previously instigated him to become king by killing his father. But once Parikshit had sat on the throne, he decided not only to solidify his position but also to extend his dominion. He therefore, kept aside his earlier good relations with Lakshminarayan and taking advantage of a heavy flood there, invaded the kingdom of the latter on the Bahirbandh region.⁸⁹ Lakshminarayan, being handicapped by the flood, had to wait till January of the next year when he had marched against Parikshit and reached as far as the fortress of Ghilajaypur where Parikshit opposed him.⁹⁰ A fierce battle followed and the result proved disastrous to Lakshminarayan who suffered an immense loss of men and materials including his brother Birnarayan.⁹¹ Parikshit also captured twenty *Karjis* of Lakshminarayan.⁹² After three months, Lakshminarayan sent peace proposals urging upon Parikshit to release all the captives including the *Karjis*. The latter consented on condition of Lakshminarayan's return of Raghudev's royal umbrella which the latter had lost to him (Lakshminarayan) in course of his encounter with the former.⁹³ On Lakshminarayan's agreeing to this proposal, Parikshit also released all the captives.⁹⁴ Although the date of the event is not given in the *Vamsavali*, it may reasonably be held that it took place sometime after 1603 and before 1608 when Parikshit sought Ahom help to fight the Koch-Mughal front.

The *Vamsavali* mentions that Lakshminarayan finding that it would not be possible for him to fight Parikshit single handed, decided to seek help from the Mughal governor of Bengal. In the meantime, Jahangir Quli Beg (1607-1608) was succeeded by Islam Khan alias Shaikh Ala-ud-din Chisti, in May 1608 as the governor of Bengal, who, as usual, demanded that Lakshminarayan should renew his acceptance of Mughal vassalage.⁹⁵ Lakshminarayan therefore, appeared in person before the new governor (1609) and paid his share of annual tribute and offered to join the imperial force in case it would invade the kingdom of Parikshit.⁹⁶ This submission of Lakshminarayan had subsequently brought about complete political

subjection of Koch Behar and it soon affected the states of Kamrup and Assam as well.

On the other side, Islam Khan in order to seek a prelude to war against Parikshit demanded his submission to the Mughals. But Parikshit, who took pride in his independent status, did not comply with the demands of Islam Khan.⁹⁷ Thereupon Islam Khan despatched an army against Parikshit under Abdul Wahid. But Parikshit easily defeated the army⁹⁸, and the commander (Abdul Wahid), instead of returning to Islam Khan, had directly proceeded to Fatehpur en route to Delhi.

Islam Khan then decided to send a fresh expedition against Parikshit, the cause for which according to the *Padishahnama*, was provided by the case of Raghunath, zamindar of Shusang (between Karaibari and the Garo Hills), whose family had been kept in confinement by Parikshit. Raghunath is said to have complained against Parikshit and requested Islam Khan for their (family) immediate recovery.⁹⁹ Islam Khan sent Mukarram Khan as the Commander-in-Chief, who was accompanied by Shaykh Kamal, Shaykh Muhi-ud-din, brother of Mukarram Khan, Mirza Iman Quli Beg Shamlu and Raghunath.¹⁰⁰ The army consisted of 6000 horses, 10,000 to 12,000 foot soliders, 500 war ships,¹⁰¹ and 300 elephants.¹⁰² Besides, a sum of seven hundred thousands rupees was given as the expense of the army.¹⁰³

Parikshti now approached the Ahom king Pratap Singha and represented through his ambassador that after occupying Kamrup, if at all it happened, the Mughals would fall upon Assam, so the *Svargadeo* should help him immediately with men and materials to fight the common enemy.¹⁰⁴ But meanwhile relations between Parikshit and the Ahom king Pratap Singha had become cool, if not strained. It may here be recalled that the Ahom king Pratap Singha gave asylum to Man Singha, a brother of Parikshit, after his being defeated in the war of succession and established him in Namrup with princely status. Parikshit also in his turn, had sheltered a number of Ahom political offenders.¹⁰⁵ This had displeased Pratap Singha and led him to doubt the fidelity of the Coch ruler. Pratap Singha therefore did not comply with the request of Parikshitnarayan, instead he expressed his desire that Parikshit should try to

form in his own kingdom a junction and then the combined forces would proceed against the invaders and fight successfully.¹⁰⁶ The suggestion was not acceptable to Parikshit. He therefore, offered to fight single-handed.

Events of the War

The Mughal army which started from Barampur, a village at a distance of about 6 miles from Dacca in July 1612, encamped first at a place called Tuk,¹⁰⁷ about 28 miles to the north-east of Dacca. Thencefrom the cavalry proceeded on land and the navy through the Brahmaputra. On the way the army halted at Bazarpur, 6 miles away to the north of Sherpur, and then at Paladah and finally reached Sulkuna¹⁰⁸ on the south-western border of Kamrup where the naval force of Parikshit consisting of 300 war boats met the imperial force. In the encounter that followed, the Koch navy was defeated, its commander fled and a number of war materials fell to the Mughals.¹⁰⁹

The victorious imperialists now arranged their own regiments and pursued after Parikshit who had already stationed his army in the fort of Dhubri.¹¹⁰ They reached as far as the vicinity of Dhubri where they halted at a place about four miles distant from Parikshit's fort. But finding that there was no possibility of any immediate battle, Mirza Nathan, with his own regiment raided the areas of Bahirbandh and Bhitirbandh, where the local *zamindars* who owed allegiance to Lakshminarayan had rioted. The result of the raid was, as expected. Most of these *zamindars* came to submission and promised to 'settle peacefully'.¹¹¹

The fort of Dhubri, "the foremost of all the forts" of Koch Hajo was guarded by 500 horses and 100 infantry soldiers.¹¹² The imperialists had to make well preparations before the fort could be attacked. After a number of undecided skirmishes, they adopted a novel plan to capture the fort. The soldiers began clearing the jungles around it. The work being over, they constructed small stockades and surrounded the fort. The process was so complete that not to speak of the firings, it was 'impossible even for a bird to move' from inside the fort.¹¹³ The *Beldars* (a wing of the army) then proceeded to the fort-

wall and being unopposed by the enemy who was rather making preparations to flee, caused an opening of the wall wide enough even for an elephant to enter, and rushing inside they immediately captured the fort. Fath Khan Salka, the commander of the fort was captured and the Koch soldiers either fled away or fell to the hands of the enemy. It is stated in the *Baharistan* that one elephant driver with his elephant called 'Ranbhunwar' fought to the last even after the fall of the fort.¹¹⁴

The fall of the fort at Dhubri was a great havoc to Parikshit, who had now no alternative than to submit to the invaders. The proposal to this effect, however, came from the imperialists. Shaykh Kamal sent through an envoy the following message to Parikshit:

It is clear to you that to-night either you will be made a captive or you shall have to evacuate the fort of Gilah (*i.e.*, the next stronghold of Parikshit) and go your way to the desert as a vagrant. You must thank God, that I am showing this great favour to you and saving you from extirpation. If even now you behave properly, it is well and good; otherwise you do not know what will happen.¹¹⁵

Parikshit who himself was ready to offer such a proposal, accepted it as this was the only way open for him. He offered two elephants and 80,000 silver coins as presents to the Shaykh and agreed to pay 10,000 rupees, 100 elephants and 100 *tanga* horses to the imperialists as annual tribute. Besides, he sent his sister to Islam Khan's harem¹¹⁶ and agreed to offer 3,00,000 rupees, 300 *tanga* horse and 300 elephants as presents to the Mughal emperor on condition of his being excused from personally attending at Delhi.¹¹⁷ But when this was communicated to Islam Khan, he flatly refused to agree to Parikshit's proposal and stated that he must pay his personal submission to the emperor, otherwise his kingdom would be annexed to the Mughal empire.¹¹⁸

Resumption of Hostilities

As a result, hostilities were resumed. Lakshminarayan, an ally of the Mughals attacked the Khuntaghat region. Parikshit,

who was then stationed at the fort of Ghila, his camp on the west bank of the river Gadadhar, marched against him and opposed him for seven days compelling him to seek for reinforcements. Accordingly, Mukarram Khan sent *Raja* Satrajit the zamindar of Bhushna who came with 200 war-boats and a contingent of Afghan cavalry, in order to blockade the communication of Parikshit, and constructed a fort at the mouth of the Gadadhar river.¹¹⁹ At this critical moment, Parikshit sent his son-in-law, the Dimarua *Raja* with a strong navy including 700 soldiers and 50 elephants to fight the enemy at the mouth of the Gadadhar river, while he with his local land force of 156,000 archers, 5,000 cavalry, 5,000 musketeers and 300 elephants,¹²⁰ proceeded to make an attack on the Dhubri fort. In the naval engagement, the Dimarua *Raja* achieved a complete success;¹²¹ a large number of casualties including 400 musketeers and about 200 war-boats fell to the *Raja*. But Parikshit on his part arrived sufficiently late, thereby allowing the imperialists to fall on him from all directions. Consequently his whole scheme failed and all his soldiers took to flight. Parikshit himself fled and reached his former position at Ghila.¹²²

Parikshit then joined the navy at the command of the Dimarua *Raja* and attacked the imperial force on the bank of the Sonkosh.¹²³ Unfortunately, the commander of the standing army, Nitai Chandra Nazir had a fall from his elephant and was immediately captured.¹²⁴ Even then at the initial stage Parikshit achieved some success, but as ill luck would have it, the Dimarua *Raja*, who had just arrived at the spot after his victory at the Gadadhar, now fell fighting. His soldiers, unable to withstand the enemy attack, retreated.¹²⁵

Parikshit, finding his position quite precarious, retreated to Ghila, hotly pursued by the imperialists. He crossed the Monas and reached Barnagar.¹²⁶ For the next week Parikshit had been continuously searched for by the enemy soldiers. Meanwhile, Mirza Qasim Khazanchi and Satrajit had arrived on the Monas to prevent Parikshit from entering Kamrup proper. But to their surprise, he had already crossed the river and reached Pandu. The Mughal fleet, followed by the land force, then advanced as far as Pandu. Parikshit now had no way out but to submit. Thus after a long drawn struggle, Parikshit had to

surrender to the Mughals and allow all his possessions to be taken over by the imperialists. His kingdom as far as the Barnadi was then annexed to the Mughal empire. This had closed the chapter of his hostility with Lakshminarayan, although in the real field, the war was no longer confined to the rival Koch kingdoms alone, but covered the imperial Mughals as well. This took place in the last part of A.D. 1612.

Parikshit was then brought to Dacca and thence from to Delhi. Local chronicles state that Jahangir made him promise to live amicably with Lakshminarayan in future,¹²⁷ and to pay a sum of seven lacs rupees to Delhi,¹²⁸ and then released him. But when the Governor of Bengal suspected that Parikshit would prove a danger in future, he cancelled the emperor's order and did not allow him to return to his country. Parikshit, therefore, returned to Delhi; and on his way back, he died on the bank of the Ganges.¹²⁹

Parikshit's kingdom now became a part of the Mughal empire. The Mughals established their own system of administration there and called it *Bilayat Koch-Hajo*. It was divided into four *Sarkars* (districts) each consisting of a number of *Parganas* for collecting revenues.¹³⁰ Abdus Salam who was then stationed at Hajo as the Commander-in-Chief of the imperial army, appointed a number of revenue officers for this purpose.¹³¹ A force of 10,000 to 12,000 soldiers was stationed at Hajo who were provided with land in return for their military services.¹³²

Thus the political relations between the Koches and the Mughals developed during the days of Naranarayan and based on equal terms, now resulted in the miserable subjugation of the Koches by the Mughals and the latter's establishment of complete hegemony over them. The disappearance of Kamrup as a buffer state between the Mughals and the Ahoms, now brought the latter into direct clash with the former; and Pratap Singha had now no way out but to fight them single handed.

Balinarayan established at Darrang by the Ahom King Pratap Singha

At the defeat of Parikshitnarayan at the hands of the Mughals, his brother Balinarayan along with his kinsmen left

for the Ahom kingdom for protection.¹³³ King Pratap Singha who found Balinarayan paying him obeisance "at full length with his face to the ground"¹³⁴ was fully convinced of his honesty, and found that with this prince, he could fight the Mughals, who had already taken possession of the territory from the Barnadi to the Bharali in the north by defeating the local Bhuyans ruling in that region.¹³⁵ But Pratap Singha did not have to wait long, for in the year 1615 the Mughals undertook their first systematic attack upon the Ahom kingdom under their commanders Syed Hakim and Syed Aba Bakr.¹³⁶ The Ahoms opposed the invaders on the bank of the Bharali river¹³⁷ and by inflicting a crushing defeat on them pushed them back as far as the Barnadi. Thus the region called in the *Vamsavali* as the *Darranga-Desa*, became free of Mughal occupation, and Pratap Singha established Balinarayan as the tributary king over it. The Ahom king, being satisfied with Balinarayan's religious disposition, called him Dharmanarayan,¹³⁸ who thus became the originator of a new line of Koch kings called the *Darrangi Rajas*. These *Rajas* continued to rule at Darrang as vassals of the Ahoms until it was annexed by the British in the first-half of the 19th century.

Pratap Singha's establishment of Dharmanarayan in Darrang was an act of diplomacy on his part. By it he not only gained a faithful ally but also the moral support of the hill chiefs of Kamrup, whose overlords the Koches had been. Patriotic and ambitious but at the same time patient and audacious Dharmanarayan was resolved to drive out the enemy from his ancestral possessions and waged a strenuous fight to that end. He was helped by the hill chiefs vanquished by the Mughals as well as by the Ahom king. In all the operations he had undertaken, he exhibited 'skilful leadership, crafty strategy and military genius' and thereby proved himself till his death in 1638 "the most persistent enemy of the Mughal authority in Kamrup."¹³⁹ In the words of S.N. Bhattacharyya:

Like the great Rajput hero, Rana Pratap of Chitor he refused to bow down to the Imperial authority and held his head high as long as he lived, though relentlessly pursued through the hills and dales of Kamrup and Darrang.¹⁴⁰

It is thus seen that mutual hatred and jealousy between the two ruling houses greatly weakened the Koches and made them both victims of Mughal imperialism. The Mughals were sure to advance towards the north-east, but their possession of the western Brahmaputra valley would not have been so easy without the rivalry between the western and the eastern Koch kingdoms. On the other hand if the Koches along with the Ahoms stood as one man against the Mughals, the very nature of the Mughal north-east frontier policy would have been different.

REFERENCES

1. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1067.
2. DRV, v. 618.
3. This is also confirmed by the *Akbarnama* which calls him *Patkunwar*, meaning an heir apparent, *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1067.
4. KB, p. 13. Raghudev grew so much suspicious that when one day Naranarayan offered the *Nirmali* of the *Durga-Puja* first to Lakshminarayan instead of offering it to him, as he usually had done, Raghudev took it as an indication that he would soon be deprived of his claim to the throne, KGC, pp. 614f.
5. DRV, vv. 622-623.
6. S. K. Bhuyan, (comp.), *Annals of Delhi Badshahate*, 1947, Gauhati, p. 184, being a translation of the *Padshah Buranji* (henceforth abbreviated as ADB).
7. DRV, vv. 627, 637; KGC, p. 615.
8. *Ibid.*, vv. 648-649.
9. ADB, p. 185.
10. DRV, vv. 648-649.
11. EIM, pp. 415f.
12. Cf. W. W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. X, Reprint. Delhi, p. 407, (henceforth SABH).
13. ABGB, p. 47.
14. HAG, p. 57.
15. HCGh, p. 152.
16. PSN, p. 3, Inscription No. 4; See Appendix E.
17. DRV, v. 681.
18. *Ibid.*, vv. 677-678.
19. KB, pp. 18ff; PAB, p. 58.
20. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, pp. 53ff;
21. GCR, v. 1067; KGC, pp. 187f.
22. J. H. Ryley, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
23. Wessels, *op. cit.*, pp. 122ff.

24. cf. HCGh p. 4; *Bengal: Past and Present*, Vol. XXIX, 1925, p. 14.
25. *Bengal: Past and Present*, Vol. XXIV, p. 14.
26. Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 122ff.
27. *Cooch Behar Gazetteer*, Part I, 1896, p. 26;
28. Ms. *Rajopakhyana*.
29. HCGh, p. 6.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 6f.
31. YT, *Patal* XII, vv. 2, 21-22.
32. cf. H. K. Adhikari, *Rajvamsikula Pradipa*, Calcutta, B.S. 1315, p. 65; here the verse runs as follows:
'*Aham Kocha-badhupure Jalpeswara iti Sthitah*', (meaning I dwell in Kocha-badhupura in form of Jalpeswara.)
33. KJPK, p. 5.
34. SABH, p. 408.
35. See Appendix D.
36. See Appendix E.
37. K. Saikia, (comp.), *Gurucarit*, Nowgong, 1965, p. 450f. (henceforth abbreviated as GCS).
38. H. N. Datta Baruah, (ed.), *Astadvas Parva Mahabharata*, *Adi Bana Parva* Section, vv. 3103-3104.
39. *Pushpa Harana Bana Parva* Section, v. 3935.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1067.
42. Ryley, *op. cit.*, pp. 111f.
43. EHKB, p. 215.
44. S. K. Chatterji, *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, Gauhati University, 1970, p. 72.
45. HBS, II, p. 197.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
47. *Hayagriva-Madhava Temple Stone Inscription*, see, Appendix E.
48. AAW, p. 210.
49. *Ibid.*
50. MNEFPB, p. 105fn.
51. The earliest coins of Raghudev are dated A. D. 1588 which were inscribed a year after the death of Naranarayan.
52. AAW, pp. 111f.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 211f.
54. MNEFPB, p. 112. The *Kamrupar Buranji* mentions that Raghudev was advised by his counsellors (Sil Khan, Phate Khan, Purandar Laskar, the son-in-law of the king, Nitai Chandra (Chatra?) Nazir, Panchananda Thakur, Kabindra Patra, Gadadhar Baruah and others) to undertake this expedition, KB, p. 14.
55. ADB, p. 15; HCGh, p. 171.
56. ADB, p. 14.
57. HAG, p. 63.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
59. *Ibid.*

60. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1043.
61. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1063.
62. The *Akbarnama* simply states that Raghudev 'collected an army and took possession of some territory', pp. 1068, 1081f.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 1068.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 1068, 1081. Abul Fazl records that seeing that "by the help of Isa" when Raghudev "had some success" Lakshminarayan petitioned H. M. and through Raja Man Singh requested that he might be associated with eternal dominion. The *Raja* (Man Singh) hastened from Salimnagar to Anandpur, Lachmi Narain received him at a distance of forty *kos*. On 13 *Dai* they embraced on horse back and there was banquet of friendship. Afterwards, the *Raja* went to his quarters, thinking that he would then treat the chief with honour. On the way he observed, that the latter was distressed and so he dismissed him with respect.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 1081f.
66. *Akbarnama*, III, pp. 1081f.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 1093f.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 1094.
69. DAB, pp. 58f; PAB, p. 55; ABS, p. 25.
70. ABSMJC, p. 39.
71. *Ibid.*
72. MNEFPB, p. 121.
73. HAG, p. 65. But Gait seems to contradict his own view when he says elsewhere that A.D. 1593 may be accepted as an approximate date of Raghu's death, "Koch Kings of Kamarupa", *loc. cit.*, p. 304.
74. ABGB, p. 47.
75. Ms. *Prasiddhanarayanar Vamsavali*.
76. PAB, p. 55.
77. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, p. 53.
78. R. D. Banerji, 'Inscribed Guns from Assam', JASB (new series), Vol. VII, 1911, pp. 45f.
79. HAG, p. 65.
80. DRV, vv. 694-698.
81. MNEFPB, p. 123.
82. They were Parikshitnarayan, Indranarayan, Jadurai, Bhava Singha, Mukunda, Mangal, Balinarayan, Man Singha, Mahindra, Sundara-narayan, Maydan, Ramchandra, Vrishaketu, Hemanarayan, Madhu-narayan, Ananta, Pratap and Vijay Singha, DRV, vv. 692-693; KB, p. 14.
83. AAAW, pp. 21df; HAG, p. 65.
84. ABS, p. 28.
85. ADB, p. 186.
86. DRV, v. 730
87. Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
88. DRV, v. 732.

89. *Ibid.*, v. 734.
90. AAAW, p. 213.
91. *Ibid.*, DRV, v. 739.
92. One Bara Karji among them refused to prostrate before Parikshit and did so only when his life was threatened, AAAW, pp. 213f.
93. *Supra*, p. 141.
94. AAAW, p. 214.
95. *Baharistan*, I, p. 40.
96. *Ibid.*
97. *Ibid.*; Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, p. 53.
98. *Baharistan*, I., p. 40.
99. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, p. 53.
100. *Baharistan* I, p. 222.
101. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, p. 53.
102. *Baharistan*, I, p. 223.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
104. PAB, pp. 61f; AAAW, p. 215; ABSMJC, p. 45
105. PAB, p. 61.
106. AAAW, p. 215; ABSMJC, p. 46; PAB, p. 62.
107. *Baharistan*, I, p. 223.
108. S.N. Bhattacharyya identifies it with Talconow in Runnell's map, MNEFPB, p. 138fn.
109. *Baharistan*, I, p. 229.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
111. *Ibid.*, pp. 230f.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 230
113. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
114. *Ibid.*, p. 236. About this incident both the *Vamsavali* and the *Buranjis* are silent. This is possibly because while the Koch chronicler did not like to describe in detail the story of the fall of his patron, the Ahom chroniclers might have lacked a detailed knowledge of it.
115. *Baharistan*, I, pp. 239f.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
117. *Ibid.*
118. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
120. *Ibid.*, p. 243. But the *Padishahnama* mentions that his land force consisted of 20 elephants, 400 cavalry and 10,000 *paiks*, Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, p. 54.
121. *Baharistan*, I, p. 243.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
123. Gait identifies this Sonkosh with a smaller river of that name which flows into the Brahmaputra east of Dhubri.—HAG, p. 67fn.
124. *Baharistan*, I, p. 246.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
126. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, p. 54; *Baharistan*, I, p. 251.

127. DRV, vv. 766-769; ADB, p. 191.
128. AAAW, p. 218.
129. DRV, v. 778.
130. William Robinson, A, *Descriptive Account of Assam*, Delhi, 1975, p. 156; *Baharistan*, I, p. 272; KB, pp. 31, (Appendix), 131.
131. *Baharistan*, I, pp. 272f.
132. HAG, p. 68.
133. DRV, vv. 780-785.
134. AAAW, p. 238.
135. That the region between the Barnadi and the Bharali, was ruled by some Bhuyans, and hence lay outside the kingdoms of both Parikshit and Pratap Singha, can be proved by a statement in the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* which states that, Balinarayan, after he had fled from his kingdom, stayed for a year in the *Darranga-Desa* with one *Bara Bhuyan*, DRV, v. 782.
136. HAG, p. 110.
137. *Ibid*, p. 110.
138. AAAW, p. 157.
139. MNEFPB, p. 181.
140. *Ibid*.

Administration

The military success of the Koches and their rule for a fairly long period indicate that they had an efficient administrative machinery. But details of its working are greatly lacking. We are therefore to reconstruct their administrative history on the basis of certain stray references in their own chronicles, the Persian works, contemporary literature and a few inscriptions. The British, when they took possession of Koch Behar, made a survey of their ancient administrative set up which also helps us in this matter.

Kingship: Origin and Nature

The Koch state had a monarchical government and the Koch kings claimed divine origin tracing their descent for Lord Siva. Thus king Biswa Singha was compared with different gods like Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Indra, Aditya, Vayu, Varuna, and Kuvera etc;¹ and his successors beginning from Naranarayan, had assumed the title 'Narayan', the name of the supreme god of the Hindus.² Naranarayan has also been compared with traditional figures like Arjuna, Dadhichi, Karna and Kandarpa³ while Raghudev with Ram, the 'greatest man of the Raghu race'.⁴ By thus ascribing fictitious divine origin to kingship, the Koch monarchs, as it had been in case of other rulers, in India could command respect and submission from the people, which helped them in consolidating their power and position. Actual objective of innovations of such fictitious origin for the tribal kings, was however, to derive gains for the Brahmins themselves who could enjoy as their

rewards "lucrative posts at court and lands granted to them by their proselytes."*

Rules of Succession

Succession to the throne was hereditary, but the right of inheritance was not always based upon the law of primogeniture. Thus Biswa Singha selected his second son Naranarayan to succeed him to the throne. Still then the nobility, in its own interest, sometimes used to lay aside the claim of the legal nominee and place their own on the throne. It may be recalled in this connection that in spite of Naranarayan's being selected as the heir-apparent, Nara Singha, usurped the throne and ruled for a brief period taking advantage of the former's absence from the capital, obviously with the support of a section of the nobility. Similar was the case with Raghudev. After the birth of Lakshminarayan, who being the son of the reigning king had greater possibility of becoming king, Raghudev manipulated the affairs in such a way that he retained his right to kingship at the cost of the division of the kingdom. A king without an heir sometimes used to nominate his successor from amongst his nearest relatives. Thus Naranarayan nominated his brother's son Raghudev as heir. If no arrangement for succession was made by the king during his life time, the nobility decided the question and installed a prince of the royal blood to the throne. This of course happened much later in 1681 when at the death of Modanarayan, the king of Koch Behar, his brother Vasudevvarayan succeeded him to the throne.⁵

Qualities of the King

A crown prince was expected to be possessed of certain qualities. Besides his being well up in academic pursuits and the study of the *Sastras* including the *Vedas*, he was to be proficient in the art of administration,⁶ as well as in military and physical training. Naranarayan is said to have derived the name 'Malladev' or 'Mallanarayan' because of his mastery in

*HAG, p. 10.

physical training.⁷ It was for this reason that considerable care had been taken to impart military education to the crown prince. This, however, does not mean that academic pursuits were neglected by a Koch prince. On the other hand, Naranarayan and Chilarai had their education at Benaras and were great patrons of learning and education. Like them many a ruler of the dynasty were not only patrons of scholars and poets, but were themselves men of learning and scholarship.

The dynastic chronicles have put much emphasis on a king's acquiring humane traits and cultivating modest behaviour. He was expected to possess a sound moral character and exhibit qualities like liberality, charity, heroism, catholicity and truthfulness befitting a benevolent monarch. Thus Biswa Singha is said to have possessed of all good qualities found in the world.⁸ In a like way, Naranarayan has been praised to be like "an ocean of all goodness... versed in many *Sastras*, possessed of an excellent character and beautiful appearance like the God Indra".⁹

The Coronation Ceremony

The *Abhisheka* is an important event in the process of a king's assuming power. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* records how the coronation ceremonies of Biswa Singha, Naranarayan and their successors were performed with pomp and dignity. It is stated that on a specific date, fixed according to astrological calculations, all inhabitants of the capital including beggars assembled there and participated in the ceremony. For solemnising the ceremony, waters were collected from different holy rivers of India which were sprinkled over the king's head before he was made to sit on the *Simhasana* or the *Rajpat* (the throne) with the *Chatra* (royal umbrella) over his head, and the *Danda* (sceptre) in his hands.¹⁰

The ceremony was performed according to Vedic rites, under the guidance of the *Raja-Purohita* or the royal priest. Sacrifices were made to propitiate the gods, and Brahmins, priests and astrologers were offered grants of lands, slaves and servants.¹¹ The *Vamsavali* records that, even lands with grown paddy were granted to the Brahmins on that occasion.¹² The beggars, the poor and the attendants were also gifted with

numerous presents.¹³ One interesting fact to be noted is that even though the ceremony was conducted in accordance with Vedic rites, the Koch, the Mech, the Kachari and other tribal people living in the capital participated in the ceremony and performed worship accompanied by their traditional music and dance praying for longevity and prosperity of the new king.¹⁴

We have stated earlier that coins were issued by the kings on the occasion of their accession to the throne and it also appears that immediately after his accession, the king used to pay his visit to different parts of the kingdom, as was done by Naranarayan.¹⁵

Rights and Duties of the King

As the head of the state, the king was the pivot of all branches of administration, and was to keep an eye on the activities of his subordinate officers, both in the centre and in the provinces or the local administrative units. Being the source of all power, he could, in theory, make his will a law. But in practice, there were certain restrictions upon his exercising power arbitrarily. For example, a king was to rule according to the *Vidhi* of the *Sastras* (religious texts),¹⁶ honour the traditional laws and customs of the society and listen to the suggestion of the council of ministers. Besides, "the religious and legal sanction of the coronation ceremony, the spiritual influence of the *Puruhita*, the traditional emphasis on the rule of the law or *dharma*, the king's training as a crown prince, the customs of the people and the country, the devolution of the machinery of government, and the king's duty of protection, which if not carried out might lead to revolt".¹⁷ It appears from the *Vamsavali* that the Koch kings usually followed the guidelines given in the *Kalika Purana*, a 10th century work, in matters relating to state-craft and also regarding rights and duties of a king. This source (*Vamsavali*) further records that Biswa Singha's relations with the people were like those of a father with his children.¹⁸

The king's first and foremost duty was to protect the life and property of the people, to defend the kingdom from external aggression and prevent anarchy or misrule. He was to see that justice prevailed in all parts of the kingdom; the

guilty were punished and the virtuous were rewarded.¹⁹ From what has been recorded in the *Vamsavali*, it appears that the Koch king paid due attention to the social organisations of different castes and classes of people, and both the tribals and Hindu communities were free to follow their own manners and customs. Provision of facilities for promotion of education and learning was also supposed to be an important duty of the king. We have seen how the Koch kings patronised Brahmin scholars, made them land-grants, and established *Satras*,²⁰ and made their court a centre of learning. The king was the head of the army, and it was he, who, in consultation with the council of ministers, could declare war and conclude peace. He was also the head of finance. He maintained a treasury and levied different taxes on the people, which he was to spend for the purpose of defence and public welfare. Ralph Fitch informs us that the king paid attention to giving medical facilities not only to his people, but also to birds and animals.

It may be noted here that the Koch kings entertained the visitors with different kinds of amusements and were always ready to listen to the petitioners, be he a commoner. This was how, internal disturbances in the kingdom specially during the reign of the first two rulers were successfully evaded.

The *Kalika Purana* states that a wise king was to listen to the advice of the wise and learned Brahmins and learn from them the essence of the *Sastra*.²¹ It was possibly in accordance with this principle, that the Koch king appointed a *Raja-Puruhita* or a royal priest who was invariably a Brahmin. Undoubtedly the *Raja-Puruhita* who was expected to have mastery over the *Sastras*²² and well trained in the sixty-four *Kalas*,²³ acted as an adviser to the king; but in reality, it was *Dharma* or the rule of law which guided his ideals and duties.

Council of Ministers

The king was helped by a council of ministers in administering the kingdom. We have earlier referred as to how Biswa Singha appointed twelve ministers called *Karjis* from among his kinsmen. They were also called *Patras*²⁴ or *Amatyas*.²⁵ The *Vamsavali* further records that there was a cabinet to assist the king in formulating his administrative policy. *Karjis* who

became members of the cabinet were called *Mantrins*. The cabinet usually consisted of two ministers, the *Yuvaraja* who was also the Prime Minister and the king himself. *Mantrins* were appointed on the basis of certain qualifications, e.g., he was to have erudite scholarship, diplomatic skill, proficiency in the art of war with the ability to serve as a commander and, above all, he must be loyal and trustworthy.²⁶

In a like way every *Karji* or *Patra* was required to be efficient in the wielding of arms, because he was expected to command an army. We have seen that one Bhimbal *Patra* and a Bahubal *Patra* commanded Naranarayan's land forces against the Ahoms in A.D. 1562-63. Again one Kabindra *Patra* served both Raghudev and Parikshitnarayan in the capacity of a minister as well as a commander.²⁷ The *Karji* was also required to have a knowledge of state-craft and be a man of moral integrity and intelligence.

During Naranarayan's reign his brother Chilarai, the *Yuvaraja* and Prime Minister, also held the office of the *Dewan*. The *Dewan* was to deal with the matters of finance. But the *Gurucaritas* refer to Chilarai as the *Chota-Dewan* or the *Chota-Raja* and to Naranarayan as the *Bar-Dewan* or the *Bar-Raja* and mention Chilarai as the virtual ruler who administered the eastern part of the kingdom as a provincial governor.²⁸ It is likely that this direct involvement of Chilarai in the administration of this region later enabled his son Raghudev to rise in rebellion and establish himself as an independent king there.

Office of the Nazirdeo

Contemporary Persian chronicles like the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* and later British records contain reference to an officer of the Koch kingdom, called *Nazir* or *Nazirdeo*, acting as Commander in the field.²⁹ But the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* does not make any mention of this post. Khan Choudhury states that this office existed since the days of Naranarayan, who appointed a Brahmin to it.³⁰ It was thus an innovation of this great king in the field of his administration whereby he associated all sections of people in the state affairs. From the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, we find that during the reign of Parikshitnarayan, one Nitay Chatra Nazir was holding that post and fought against

the Mughals as the head of the standard bearers of Parikshit.³¹ Till the time of Lakshminarayan, the custom of assigning that post to a Brahmin continued; but after him, on account of some political ground, that rule was revoked and one royal kindred was appointed to that assignment. The first non-Brahmin to hold that post was prince Mahinarayan, a son of Lakshminarayan.³² It was from that time onwards that this post became hereditary possession of the royal family.

Department of Royal Household

As stated earlier, there was a department of royal household at the centre resembling that of the Mughals under the *Khan-i-Saman* or High-Steward.³³ The Department included the *Raja-Puruhita*³⁴ enjoying highest status and influence followed by that of the *Daivajna* or astrologer.³⁵ It appears that the advice of the *Raja-Puruhita* and the findings of the *Daivajna* were highly valued by the members of the royal family. Besides, there was a *Vaidya* (royal physician) who was an expert in the science of medicine and who knew how to prepare various drugs and dishes.³⁶ Another employee engaged in the personal service of the king was the *Tamuli* or the betelnut supplier. Probably, the most trusted of all the house-hold employees was the *Supkar* (in charge of the royal kitchen), who was expected not only to be impassionate, impressive, good looking, neat and clean, but also to be an expert in the preparation of varieties of food.³⁷ The *Dvari* or the gate-keeper had kept guard at the doors of the royal household and intimate the king about the arrival of reporters and visitors.³⁸ The *Majumdar* (or *Majindar*) who knew state-craft and kept records of events, acted as personal assistant to the king.³⁹

Department of Foreign Affairs

The department dealing with the foreign affairs was headed by a minister,⁴¹ under the personal supervision of the king. This department was responsible for making allies and cementing treaties and friendships with other countries. Important officials like the *Chars* or *Dutas* (the spies and envoys), whose duties were to collect secret information about other countries with

whom they had diplomatic relations, as and when necessary, were associated with the department.⁴¹ Their number was sufficiently large and they were expected to be men of great integrity and keen foresight. We have also reference to a class of officers called *Katakis* (ambassadors), who acted as state-representatives. Sometimes the *Karjis* also were appointed as *Katakis*.⁴² However, the king had always personally supervised their works and in all matters relating to the formation of an alliance or declaring war and concluding peace with other countries, he took the initiative.

Military Department

The strength and stability of a kingdom, particularly in those days, depended upon its military power. As such the department of war was the most important in the administrative machinery. This department in the Koch kingdom was headed by a minister with the capacity of a *Senapati*⁴³ (General). It is, however, a fact that in declaring a war against any kingdom, the king consulted all the ministers instead of doing it with the *Senapati* alone. In all the battles fought since the time of Biswa Singha, the king either accompanied his invading army under the command of a minister, or had himself commanded the force. This clearly shows that not much importance was shown to the office of the *Senapati*, who was most probably the head of a small regular army stationed at the capital to serve any immediate call when necessary, or he was to lead the infantry only in the battle field.

(i) Division of the Army

The army consisted of two broad divisions: the land force and the navy. The former included infantry, cavalry and elephants. But most numerous was the infantry recruited from among the *Paiks* or the 'able-bodied male population' of the kingdom. An able-bodied male was called *Poa* or *Poa-Paik*, and royal officers were placed over the charge of a specific number of *Paiks*. Thus twenty such *Paiks* were placed under a *Thakuria*, one hundred under a *Saikia*, one thousand under a *Hazari*, three thousand

under an *Omra* and sixty-six thousand under a *Nawab*.⁴⁴ At the head of the infantry was the *Senapati*.

As recorded in the *Vamsavali*, the total number of fighting force was 52,25,000 in the reigns of Biswa Singha and Naranarayan.⁴⁵ But as we have stated earlier, that might be the total population of the kingdom and not the actual fighting force. The same source refers elsewhere that Naranarayan fought against the Ahom kingdom in A.D. 1562 with a force of 5,32,000 soldiers,⁴⁶ which probably included not only the Koch stalwarts, but also those from among the neighbouring tribes and the Bhuyans including their Brahmin counterparts.⁴⁷ According to the *Akbarnama*, the total force of Lakshminarayan consisted of 4,000 horse, 2,00,000 foot and 700 elephants.⁴⁸ It is therefore, a fact that at the climax of its power, the Koch kingdom possessed a force of 5 or 6 lakhs of foot soldiers.

(ii) *The Cavalry and the Elephantry*

Chilarai earned this name of his for his proficiency as a cavalry warrior, but the records are very scanty about the Koch cavalry. It is possible that it consisted of more than double the strength of what Lakshminarayan possessed. Horses were, however, not locally available and had to be imported from the Bhutan hills.⁴⁹ Even then the cavalry force of the Koches was quite strong and it was with this force mainly that Chilarai defeated the Ahoms. The observation of S.N. Bhattacharyya, that "conditions of fighting in the Assam valley afforded little scope for the development of this unit of war",⁵⁰ is tenable in case of Assam, but it is not so in case of Koch kingdom. It is, however, not known under whose supervision and command this unit of the army was placed.

The elephantry constituted an important unit of the army. The *Akbarnama* refers to this branch of Lakshminarayan as consisting of 700 elephants.* The *Vamsavali* also refers to this force but gives no detail.⁵¹ This force immensely helped Naranarayan in winning the battles fought in his south-eastern campaigns. The elephantry always preceded the army and was primarily used to clear the road, demolish enemy forts, launch

**Akbarnama*, III, p. 1067.

night attacks and for defending their own forts and in transporting war materials.⁵² The *Baharistan* records how Parikshitnarayan fought against the Mughals with his elephantry.⁵³ The elephants were well trained and they could fight at every command of their drivers (*Mahur*).⁵⁴ But Sir J.N. Sarkar points out that it was for their inferior elephantry that the Koches failed to withstand their Muslim counterparts.⁵⁵ It may therefore be concluded that in comparison with the elephant force of the Bengal Sultans the Koch elephantry was much smaller and inferior. It was for this that Chilarai sustained a defeat at the hands of Sulaiman Karrani of Bengal.

The hills and forests of the north-east India contained sufficient number of wild elephants. The king appointed some skilled persons to catch them and train them for the purposes of war. It is possible that the number of elephants engaged in fighting at a stretch was small; and they were grouped and placed under the separate command of some trained officers. As evidenced by the *Baharistan*, Parikshitnarayan engaged at a stretch not more than a hundred elephants.⁵⁶

(iii) The Navy

The next wing of the military department was the navy. It is but natural that in a land of numerous rivers and marshes, the navy was the most important means of war and transport. Abundance of woods in the forests of the kingdom facilitated the construction of war-boats, both big and small, accommodating ten to hundred persons at a time. The Koch land force which crossed the Brahmaputra and arrived at the Ahom capital at Garhgaon, might have been accompanied by a sufficiently large number of big boats to transport them across the river. The boats were called *Bacharis*, or *Koshas*.⁵⁷ The *Baharistan* mentions as many as 700 such *Bacharis*, the poops of which were high⁵⁸ and were "carved with ugly awe-inspiring faces".⁵⁹ Their armament consisted of small pieces, swivel guns, and petrachos of bronze of which the muzzles were fashioned into shapes of various animals—tigers, lions, dogs, elephants and crocodiles".⁶⁰ The navy was probably under a *Baruah*.⁶¹

(iv) War Weapons

Guns and cannons were the most important of the offensive weapons. We have earlier mentioned how Biswa Singha appointed his son Mecha in charge of guns and cannons.⁶² Fire arms made during the reign of Parikshitnarayan and his father Raghudev narayan have also been found,⁶³ and there are, even now, two guns of Raghudev in possession of the *Raja* of Gauripur.⁶⁴ Muskets, swords, spears and bamboo bows resembling those of the Ahoms, were also in use. Recently some war weapons have been dug out from a small tank in North Gauhati near the *Parikshit Pukhuri* (tank of Parikshit), which include swords and spears measuring about 2½' and 18' in length respectively and also axes. As these weapons are found on the bank of the tank ascribed to the Koch king (Parikshit), scholars are of the opinion that they belonged to the Koch kings of Kamarupa.⁶⁵ Shihabuddin Talish mentions that the Koch armies used matchlocks and arrows with poisonous apex.⁶⁶ The *Baharistan* refers to four to five thousand Koch archers called *Karis*.⁶⁷

(v) War Strategy

Night attacks with elephant forces were peculiar to the Koches like the Ahoms.⁶⁸ Biswa Singha continuously fought the Muslim soldiers, under Turbak during 1532-1533 with the guerrilla technique of warfare. The local chiefs like those of Ghoraghat and the neighbouring regions and even the Koches in the hilly regions adopted such guerrilla warfare. S.N. Bhattacharyya's contention that guerrilla warfare did not develop in Koch Behar because there were no hills and valleys,⁶⁹ is therefore, not well founded.

From Ralph Fitch's account it is evident that the capital at Koch Behar was well fortified and encompassed with cane and bamboo palisades sharpened at the top so that no enemy could get into it.⁷⁰ Fitch had also noticed that the Koches used to poison waters of the rivers to put the enemy into serious straits.⁷¹ The defence was further strengthened by the erection of forts, embankments, ramparts, and military camps etc. which played important parts in war strategy. Forts were built with

mud, bamboo and wood encompassed by palisades and ditches. Even the mighty Mughals found it too difficult to seize and occupy them.

The *Dutas* or the *Chars* to whom we have already referred, had collected every information of war and military organisations of the enemy and intimated them to the king. This helped him take appropriate measures well ahead of time.

(vi) Maintenance of Soldiers and their Training

The military force consisted of the peasantry of the kingdom called *Paiks*. They were required to come to the aid of the king when there was a war. For this, they were remunerated with three *puras* of land as *jaigirs* free of rent⁷² during the tenure of their service. The immediate officers who recruited them and trained them in different techniques of war, were also granted *jaigirs* or rent-free lands for their maintenance.⁷³

From the details of the war events of our period, it appears that the Koch land force was more efficient than their naval force. For instance, while the navy could hardly achieve any noteworthy success against the Ahoms, the land force under Chilarai had not only completely routed them, but also succeeded in defeating the other neighbouring kingdoms.

The military organisation of the Koch rested on a feudalistic system where the civil officers who were paid in terms of land and *paiks*, were discharging military duties as well. The extent of land and number of *paiks* allotted to an officer depended upon his grade or status. It appears that when Biswa Singha had first organised the Koch army in decimal system he was influenced by the military system prevalent in Bengal under the Sultans.

It appears that the Koches did not have a vast standing army. The *paiks* who were ordinarily cultivators serving under the control of the lords, who were the officers of the state, could be mobilised at a very short notice and they thus served like a regular standing army. Of course there was in the capital a small standing army under the control of a *Senapati*.

The most important factor deciding the early military success of the Koches during the period of our study was a spirit of unity among the members of different tribes and sects, and the efficient leadership under Chilarai. The need for unity

was created by the exigencies of time. Repeated attacks of the rulers and generals of Bengal, lack of a centralised administration in the Brahmaputra valley and the fear of loss of lives and properties at the hands of the enemy fostered not only a sense of solidarity among the heterogeneous people of the region but also the creation of an efficient military machine. The early Koch rulers well realised this and organised the people under an efficient civil-cum-military administration. The later Koch kings, however, failed to keep up the growing unity of the subject population and also the strength of the military, and thereby paved the way for the dismemberment and fall of their kingdom.

Administration of Justice

Available sources do not indicate that the Koches had any written constitution or code of law. Their *Vidhi* or principles of justice were mainly based on the Hindu religious texts. But the local customs and traditions prevalent among the tribal population were never violated.⁷⁴ In the village level, therefore, cases were decided by the *Grama Sabha* or village assemblies mainly according to the local customs and traditions which in many cases were not influenced by Hindu texts.

The king was considered as the source of law. It was therefore, the king who could sentence a criminal to death or offer him pardon.⁷⁵ However, in discharging judicial duties, the king was assisted by a council called *Raja-Sabha*, consisting of the *Raja-Puruhita*, and the *Pandits*. A person, if not satisfied with the decision of the *Grama-Sabha*, could file a petition to the district court of a *Choudhury*⁷⁶ or an *Ujir*⁷⁷ or make a direct appeal to the king's court which would then summon both the appellant and the respondent to appear before it on a fixed date for having a hearing. On that day witnesses of both parties were examined and then the case was dispensed with by passing a verdict based on the principles of the *Sastras* and on the *Raja-Sabha's* own standard of right and wrong. If the case was not of a serious nature, the *Raja-Sabha* was presided over by the *Raja-Puruhita* and its verdict only was sent to the king for his approval.⁷⁸

Mode of Punishment

The Koch chronicles do not throw any light on the nature of crimes and punishments prevalent in the kingdom. From the contemporary literature, it is, however, learnt that theft, robbery, adultery and moral turpitudes of serious nature, were the usual crimes. The *Carit-Puthis* refer to different kinds of punishments prevalent in the Koch kingdom. These include mutilation and physical torture like pressing between iron, wooden or bamboo cylinders called *Saranh*, *Chepa-Kunda*, *Pota-Kunda*, *Daphala-Kunda* and *Sak-Sal* etc.⁷⁹ An offender was also punished by making him sold to the Bhutiyas as slaves. Ballabh Thakur, better known as Thakur Ata, and Gakul Chandra (*Atoi*), two trusted disciples of Sankaradeva, were sold as slaves for two horses to the Bhutiyas. There was also provision for capital punishment which always required the approval of the king.⁸¹ Political offenders were often killed by strangulation.

The officers were expected to decide their cases as speedily and impartially as possible. King Naranarayan was well known for his wisdom, generosity and impartiality. When a case was placed before him, he examined every pros and cons of it and then dispensed with it with all magnanimity impressing upon both the parties that he was the father of kingdom and the subjects were like his own children. One event recorded in the *Guru-caritas*⁸² may be cited here. Once Naranarayan ordered for the preparation of a medicinal oil called *Mahanarayan Tel* incurring a considerable expenditure. Unfortunately the persons while carrying the jar containing the oil slipped and the oil splashed on to the floor. They became afraid of the king who could have penalised them severely for this loss. But when they approached the king and confessed their guilt, the latter, instead of penalising them, made a fresh payment to them directing to prepare the oil again. This shows how a commoner could approach the king for justice, and how free confession of any guilt was highly appreciated by the king.

Notwithstanding such magnanimity and wisdom on the part of the king, administration of justice in the district or lower level was not always impartial. There was the prevalence of bribery which stood on the way of impartial judgement. Even the *Grama-Sabha* members used to accept bribes and thus

make the guilty escape and innocent suffer.⁸³ But this was the case before the introduction of the institution of *Namghar* or prayer hall in the villages following the propagation of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. When the *Namghars* came into the villages, petty cases were decided there by the village council which now consisted of every adult member of a family in the village instead of a selected few, as had been earlier. This new village council stopped the notorious practice of accepting bribes and its verdict became binding upon an offender. As such, unless a case was of a very serious nature, it was not referred to the higher courts of appeal.

It was at this time that Ralph Fitch, the English traveller visited the Koch kingdom and was impressed by the prevalent administration of justice conducted on very benevolent lines. He was also amazed to notice that the Koch king's benevolence was not confined to the human beings alone but also to the kingdom of the animals and birds. To quote his own works :

They have hospitals for sheeps, goats, dogs, cats, birds and for all living creatures. When they be old and lame they keep them until they die They will give meat to the ants.⁸⁴

Land Revenue Administration

Details about the system of land revenue administration under the Koches are, however, lacking. But certain references in their chronicles and also in the records of the British officers throw some light in this matter. From these, it appears that lands were usually divided into two kinds: cultivable and uncultivable. The latter included the forests, marshes, roads, markets, swamps and other waste lands called *Khas* lands.⁸⁵ Cultivable lands were again of two categories: rented or *Khalsa*, rent-free or *Khangī*.⁸⁶ *Khangī* lands included the gifted lands, like the lands gifted to the Brahmins (*Barhmottar*) or granted to the *Satras* (*Dharmottar*), temples (*Devottar*) and mosques (*Pirpal*). Sometimes several villages were donated for maintenance of a temple along with money, slaves and servants.⁸⁷ Besides, lands given to the state officers as remunerations called *jaigirs* and the lands given to the king's relatives

for their maintenance during their lives called *petbhats* were also rent-free lands.⁸⁸ Thus rent-free lands may be classified into *Brahmottar*, *Devottar*, *Dharmottar*, *Pirpal*,⁸⁸ *Jaigirs* and *Petbhats*. Rent-free lands were held both individually e.g., by a Brahmana and institutionally, e.g., by a temple or a *Satra*.

For revenue purposes rented lands were classified according to the nature of their produce.⁸⁹ There are references to the *Baotali* (very low land where *Bao* paddy was sown), *Maghuwatali* (land for the cultivation of *Rabi* crops), *Ahutali* (where *Ahu* paddy was cultivated), *Rupit* (lands for cultivation of *Sali* or transplanted rice) etc.⁹⁰ Assessment varied depending upon fertility of soil, amount of produce or number of ploughs used.⁹¹ There is no record to show that any survey of land was undertaken during the period of our study. But certain units of land measurement like those of *halsa* or *halisa*⁹² equivalent to one *bigha*, and *bish*⁹³ equivalent to thirteen standards *bighas* of land were prevalent. Besides, there was another unit called *pura*⁹⁴ consisting of four *bighas* of land.

Incidences of land-tax

Although the actual procedure and rate of assessment in the Koch kingdom is not known it appears that some sort of Paik-system, not similar in all respects with that of the Ahoms in upper Brahmaputra Valley, existed there. The Darrang Raj Vamsavali makes mention of *Paiks*^{95a} attached to the royal officers of the state besides slaves and servants attached to their houses. These *Paiks* had to serve the state with manual works, and to go to war as soldiers when necessary. In return they enjoyed some plots of lands free of revenue. Besides, the *zamindars* like the *Bhuyans* and other high state officials like *Dewan*, *Kajri*, *Choudhury*, collected revenue from the peasants in their own way who were directly under their control, and sent a certain amount of their respective collection to the centre.* After the Koch kingdom had been annexed to the Mughal empire, the system of collection of revenue was changed. The royal princelets and other *zamindars* deposited with

*A. Guha, *Jamindarkalin Goalpara Jilar Artha-Samajik Avastha*, Dhubri, 1984, p. 4.

the imperial treasure a certain amount of their collections from the peasants. The settlement in such cases was made annually and the procedure was to "settle the *jama* agreeably to that of the preceding year."⁹⁵

Revenue was collected in cash or kind although the first was preferred. Khan Choudhury points out to a tradition which states that in an inscription of the Kamata king Nilambar the king advised his successors to realise only a very few *kowris* as revenue for each plough.⁹⁶ By this reference he appears to suppose that at least during the rule of the early Koch kings the rate of assessment was low; and the amount in terms of *kowris* had been taken from the cultivators as revenue. The *Katha Guru Carit* appears to inform us that the peasants were to pay $\frac{1}{4}$ th of their produce as rent to the royal treasury.⁹⁷ It is possible that the small revenue officers collected more than the original rate⁹⁸ and made the life of the peasant sometimes miserable. Contemporary literature informs us that sometimes the poor peasants had to fall in recurring arrears of revenue as a result of which they had to mortgage their labour to the affluent neighbours.⁹⁹

The nobles as well as the peasants could cultivate excess lands for which they were required to pay taxes either in cash or in kind. The rate is not definitely known. Major Jenkins in his report on the Koch Behar State, informs that the income from the *Khalsa* lands collected under the supervision of the *Devan* constituted $\frac{2}{3}$ rd of the total collection from land revenue.¹⁰⁰

Land Ownership

The king was the actual owner of the soil, but the cultivators' right over their hereditary possessions was never questioned by him. The estates given to the relatives of the king (*petbhat*) were subject to be taken over by the king after the guarantee's death. The *jaigir* lands were allowed to be held by the state officers during the period of their service only and was thus transferable. Available cultivable lands were distributed among the peasants and their records were kept by the concerning officers without allowing them to exercise their hereditary rights over them. They were to pay a fixed amount

of revenue or a fraction of their produce to the royal treasury. In any case, the king could occupy or bring under his control, any kind of land according to the rules and customs of the kingdom prevalent during that period.

Other Sources of Revenue

State revenue also came from different other sources. These included tributes paid by the subordinate states including those of the tribal chiefs, war spoils, levies on merchant ships, incomes from trade pursuits, presents and *baksishs*, given by the nobles or the tributary *Rajas* and taxes including the customs duties, specially those collected in the Bhutan *Duars*.¹⁰¹ The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* records that Raghudev had always kept an amount of rupees 3 crores ready in the treasury,¹⁰² which he had definitely collected from the above mentioned sources.

Local Administration

Before the introduction of the *Pargana* system following the annexation of Koch Hajo to the Mughal empire in A.D. 1612, the Koch kingdom was broadly divided into certain administrative units called *Chakla*¹⁰³ which was a collection of several villages. Each *Chakla* was placed under the control of a *Bhuyan*¹⁰⁴ who was by and large a governor who collected revenue of his *Chakla* and deposited it to the *Dewan* or the king. In between the *Chaklas* and the villages there were other administrative divisions called *Kuthi* and *Tapa*. A *Kuthi* which was a collection of three or four villages only, was ruled by a junior officer, and the *Tapa* which was larger than a *Kuthi*, was governed by an officer called *Gomsata*.¹⁰⁵ It appears that a *Chakla* was equivalent to 1/6th of a Mughal *Sarkar*. The Mughal occupied portion of the kingdom of Koch Behar was formed into a *Sarkar* called *Sarkar Koch Behar* or *Kuchwara*. This was divided into six *Chaklas* namely—Boda, Potgram, Purubhag, Fatepur, Kajirhat and Kakina.¹⁰⁶ It also appears that for administrative convenience, the Koch kingdom was broadly divided into two parts, each called a *Dewani*. The *Gurucaritas* refer to *Bar-Dewani* (i.e., Koch Behar under

Naranarayan) and *Saru* or *Chota-Dewani* (i.e., Kamarupa or Koch Hajo under Chilarai)¹⁰⁷

It appears that Naranarayan also made provision for administration of the important towns of his kingdom by dividing these into some wards called *Mahals*.¹⁰⁸ Each *Mahal* was placed under an officer called *Mahaliya* whose duty it was to keep guard over his ward and report every event occurred in it to the immediate superior officer or directly to the king.

Other Administrative Officers

Besides the officers already mentioned, there was a large number of officers of lower rank in the hierarchy of administration. They were the *Doloi* (Officer-in-charge of temples) *Sardar*¹⁰⁹ (probably the chief of certain set of junior officers), *Mukaddam*¹¹⁰ (Officer-in-Charge of artisans), *Qanungo* and *Mandal* (petty revenue officers), *Ahudi* (military personnel), *Piyada* (police footman),¹¹¹ *Dhopdhara* (officers-in-charge of sports) and others like *Biswas*, *Kandali* and *Nat-Bhat*. Another officer of junior rank was the *Chokidar* or *Chokiyal* who was to keep guard at a *Choki* (frontier post),¹¹² and in that he was an important administrative-cum-police officer.

To conclude, the Koches adopted an elaborate system of administration. The nature and designations of most of the officers like *Dewan*, *Ujir*, *Nazir*, *Sikdar*, *Piyada* and others indicate the influence of the Turko-Afghans or the Mughals in their administrative set-up which was but a natural one. The principles of Koch administration were based on the Hindu religious texts, and with the *Chatra* over his head and the *Danda* in his hands, the Koch king represented a typical Hindu ruler of ancient India. Although tribal preponderance in the administrative set-up of the founder of the kingdom was marked, this was gradually replaced by the non-tribals in the reign of his successors. Beginning with the death of Naranarayan, the nobility became much powerful and after him the ruling class became so selfish that the welfare of the people which was the main objective of the first two kings of the line, received scant importance from them.

REFERENCES

1. DRV, vv. 132-139.
2. *Supra*, p. 72.
3. *The Kamakhya Temple Inscription*, see, Appendix D.
4. See, Appendix E.
5. SABH, p. 410.
6. DRV, v. 140.
7. GSC, pp. 450f.
8. DRV, v. 143.
9. *Kamakhya Temple Rock Inscription*, See Appendix D.
10. A. Khan Choudhury, *Koch Beharer Itihas*, Cooch Behar, 1936, p. 133 (henceforth abbreviated as KBIKh).
11. DRV, v. 130.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, v. 129.
14. *Ibid.*, v. 128.
15. *Ibid.*, v. 312.
16. KRB, p. 91.
17. V. R. R. Dikshitar, *Hindu Administrative Institutions*, p. 102; cf. P. C. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 268.
18. DRV, v. 143.
19. One *Gurucarita* mentions an interesting event about how Naranarayan instructed Sankaradeva to administer the Tantikushi area, over which he was made a *Gomasta* (administrative officer). The king said, "Listen to me Sankar! I have bestowed the duty upon you: 'Reward the virtuous and punish the guilty'. If you can do this, only then you can administer without difficulty. Otherwise administration is fruitless", GCS, p. 480.
20. CSLSC, p. 97; DRV, v. 604.
21. *Kalika Purana* Calcutta, B. S. 1384, 84th Chapter, vv. 18-19, (henceforth abbreviated as KP).
22. One Kanthabhushana was the royal priest of King Naranarayan. The *Gurucarita* records that having failed to defeat Sankaradeva in religious debates, he went to Benaras for further studies and training, GCS, p. 487.
23. DRV, v. 174.
24. DRV, vv. 283, 322; H. N. Datta Baruah, *Prachin Kamrupiya Kayastha Samajar Itivritta*, Nalbari, 1941, p. 80, (henceforth abbreviated as PKSID).
25. *The Stone Inscription of Pandunath Temple* refers to an *Amatya* of Raghudev, called Gadadhara; Appendix F, see also PSN, p. 4.
26. It is recorded that one *Para Karji* (*Bara Karji*) of Lakshminarayan, who was captured as prisoner of war, refused to prostrate before Parikshit owing to his loyalty to Lakshminarayan, KB, p. 15; AAAW, pp. 213f.
27. S. N. Sarma, *Asamiya Sahityar Itibritta*, Gauhati, 1961, p. 152.

28. KGC, pp. 234f, 237f, 252, 279.
29. *Baharistan*, I, p. 246.
30. KBIKh, p. 133.
31. *Baharistan*, I, p. 246.
32. CSLSC, p. 235; PBPSS, p. 3.
33. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, Calcutta, 1972, pp. 17f.
34. One Sarbabhauma was the *Raja-Puruhita* of Biswa Singha, DRV, vv. 173-176.
35. *Ibid.*, vv. 177-179; KRB, p. 95; One Sribara was a *Daivjna* of Biswa Singha, KBIKh, p. 93.
36. DRV, vv. 180-181.
37. *Ibid.*, vv. 184-186.
38. *Ibid.*, vv. 193-94; KRB, p. 94.
39. DRV, vv. 189-190; PKSID, p. 80.
40. CSLSC, p. 225.
41. DRV, vv. 191-192.
42. One Gaja Singha Karji had accompanied the Ahom prince Sundar Gohain, the Ahom hostage, to the Ahom capital at Garhgaon and acted as a royal representative, ABSMJC, p. 38; ABHB, p. 35; ABS, p. 24.
43. DRV, vv. 170-172; That post was held by one Yuddhavar in the time of Biswa Singha, KBIKh, p. 93.
44. DRV, vv. 196-197. This system resembles the Mughal *Mansabdary* system, See KBIKh, p. 93.
45. DRV, vv. 198, 315.
46. DRV, v. 359.
47. *Supra*, pp. 87f.
48. *Akbarnama*, III, p. 1067.
49. *Infra*, pp. 231f.
50. MNEFPB, p. 36.
51. DRV, v. 201.
52. K. L. Barua, "Mirza Nathan's Narrative", JARS, Vol. v, No. 3, 1937, pp. 65ff.
53. *Baharistan*, I, pp. 238f.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 238f.
55. HBS, II, p. 182.
56. *Baharistan*, I, p. 243, 240, 238, 246.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 247; M. Neog, *Purani Asamiya Samaj Aru Samskriti Gauhati*, 1971, p. 133.
58. *Baharistan*, I, p. 243.
59. MNEFPB, p. 37.
60. Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, Vol. II, p. 100; cf. MNEFPB, p. 37; also see, paintings attached in the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*.
61. We have reference to one Tepu who was a *Baruah* and who commanded the Koch naval force against the Ahoms, DAB, p. 50.
62. *Supra*, p. 50.
63. PSN, p. 110, Plate 5; R. D. Banerji, *loc. cit.*, pp. 44f.

64. Banerji, *loc cit.*, pp. 44f.
65. *Dainik Asam*, 25th March 1980, p. 2.
66. Blochman, *loc. cit.*, p. 67.
67. *Baharistan*, I, p. 246.
68. MNEFPB, p. 35fn.
69. *Ibid.*, pp. 42ff.
70. Ryley, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
72. HCGH, p. 157.
73. CSLSC, p. 441.
74. DRV, vv. 325-327.
75. *Ibid.*, vv. 132-136; KRB, p. 91.
76. *The Katha Guru Carita* refers to one Gopal Choudhury who used to accept bribes from either party while deciding cases in his court, KGC, p. 505.
77. One Venkat Giri was an *Ujir*, over the regions of Phulaguri and Bijni during the rule of Naranarayan, PKSID, p. 80.
78. HCGH, pp. 277f; KRB, p. 91.
79. KGC, pp. 220, 227.
80. M. Neog, (ed.), *Bardowa Gurucarit*, Gauhati, 1977, pp. 148f (henceforth abbreviated as BGC).
81. KRB, p. 91.
82. GCS, p. 282; also see KGC, pp. 244f.
83. KGC, p. 505.
84. Ryley, *op. cit.*, pp. 112f.
85. CSLSC, p. 482.
86. *Selections from the Records of Government of Bengal*, No. 5, p. 23.
87. DRV, vv. 548-552, 681-684.
88. CSISC, p. 441.
89. *Ibid.*, pp. 489, 549.
90. KGC, p. 95.
91. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 206.
92. KGC, p. 658.
93. CSLSC, p. 549.
94. KGC, p. 658.
- 95a. DRV, vv. 196-199, 315-316, 548.
95. CSLSC, p. 442.
96. HCGH, p. 70.
97. KGC, p. 237.
98. Purling in his revenue account of the Koch Behar State, submitted in about A.D. 1774, found that the revenue payable by the ryot consisted of two parts: *asal* (or original) and *aboobas* (or additional), CSISC, p. 442. It is possible that such additional amount, although small in quantity, had been paid by the farmers during the rule of the early Koch kings too.
99. KGC, p. 128; MSB, v. 638;
100. *Selections from the Records of Government of Bengal*, No. 5. p. 23.

101. B. Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, pp. 49f.
102. DRV, v. 688.
103. *Kamarupa Puravritta*—KB, Appendix, p. 102.
104. *Ibid.*
105. PKSID, p. 81; PSN, p. 116.
106. J. A. Vas, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers*, Rangpur, Allahabad, 1911, p. 26.
107. KGC, p. 137; BGC, p. 166.
108. Ramcharan Thakur, states that Barpeta was a *Mahal* under Naranarayan, GCR, v. 3606.
109. KB, p. 13.
110. One Megha, a *Mukaddam* under Naranarayan, was ordered to build the Kamakhya temple, DRV, v. 537.
111. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
112. KGC, p. 582; H. N. Datta Baruah, (ed.), *Mahapurusha Sri Sankaradeva Aru Sri Madhavadeva Caritra* by Daityari Thakur, Nalbari, *Sankarabda* 509 (1958), vv. 1485-1489, (henceforth abbreviated as SMCD).

Society and Economy

Population Complex

Situated in "one of the great migration routes of mankind",¹ the north-east India may well be considered a great anthropological museum in so far as its population complex is concerned. Migrating to and settling in this region from time immemorial, population here represents an admixture of nearly all the racial strains, including the Aryans, the Alpine-Iranians and the Tibeto-Burmans, the latter being the most predominant. Although the process of Hinduisation has been going on since ancient times, it was chiefly confined to the ruling class alone, and therefore, the vast mass of population remained outside the pale of Hinduism.

The Koch kingdom too, contained members of almost all the racial elements mentioned above. For the convenience of our study, we would however, mention them as Hindus and non-Hindu tribals. Among the Hindus, the Brahmins, whose number was considerably small, held an esteemed position in the society. Besides serving as priests to both the ruling class and the Hindu-converts, they also used to enjoy high posts in administration. Both Biswa Singha and Naranarayan brought Brahmins from other parts of India and established them in their kingdom with grants of lands and servitors. Next to the Brahmins were the Kayasthas and Daivajnas or Ganakas whose professional occupations were *Kaythali* or *Kayasthika* (book-keeping and accountancy)² and astrological calculations respectively. The Kayasthas, like the Brahmins, held important offices in administration. The Kalitas, who are said to have belonged to the Alpine-Iranian stock,³ were the most numerous.

Buchanan records that they were the priests of the Koches before the latter's conversion to Hinduism.⁴

Besides, there were a large number of other Hindu castes who held inferior status in the society. Most of them derived their caste-names from the professions they held. Noted among them were the Tantis (weavers), the Katani (spinners of silk and cotton thread), the Kumars (potters), the Kamars (blacksmiths), the Sonaris (goldsmiths), the Kahars (bellmetal workers), the Dhobis (washermen), the Telis (oilmen), the Malis or Malakars (garland makers), the Doms or Kaivartas (fishermen), the Goalas (milkmen), Baniyas (traders), the Barhais (carpenters), the Muchis (cobblers), the Haris (scavengers), the Chandals (outcastes) etc. The Yogis, who claim a higher social status in the society,⁵ and who rejected "the Brahmins as spiritual guides"⁶ had their own priests.

A fraction of the society was consisted of the Muslims. Contemporary literary sources refer to the Turks or 'Turuks' and the 'Yavanas'. It is possible that both the terms refer to the Muslim community alone, for while the term 'Turuk' implies the Turks, the use of the term 'Yavana' in the *Vamsavali* and the *Gurucarita*⁷ indicates all groups of Muslims, Turko-Afghans and the Mughals. This is clear from the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* which mentions that the 'Yavanas' in the Koch kingdom lived happily by freely reciting the Quaranic verses.⁸ It is possible that the Muslims began pouring into the region since the time of Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar's invasion of Kamarupa in A.D. 1205. Their social status appears to be low, and any person accepting on any pretext Islam, was made an out-caste in the Hindu society.⁹ But Sankaradeva accepted the Muslims to his fold. Chandsai, a Muslim¹⁰ for example, was made his disciple, and was placed on an equal footing along with his other disciples.

But the major components of the population were the non-Hindu tribes. Noted among them were the Koches, the ruling tribe, the Meches, the Rabhas, the Garos, the Lalungs, the Hojais, the Kacharis, the Dimasas (a branch of the Kacharis), the Bhutiyas etc. Racially, the tribes mentioned above, are allied to the Koches. They had, however, different dialects and different manners and customs. Besides, Naranarayan established the suzerainty over the Daflas (Nishis), the Khasis, the

Jayantiyas, the Tripuris as well as over the Ahoms although for a brief period. It may be mentioned in this connection that the *Yogini Tantra* refers to the *Saumaras* (the Ahom), the *Kuvacas* (the Koches), the *Plaveas* (the Bhutiyas) and the *Yavanas*¹¹ (the Muslims) as the ruling *Mlechha* races of Kamarupa-Kamata,¹² and it appears that the term *Kuvaca* is used here in a broad sense to include all the allied Koch tribes, Hinduised or not, mentioned above.

Social Stratification and the Standard of Living

Society was feudal in character. At the top was the privileged aristocracy consisting of the nobility, dependent upon the king. The power and status of this class have been discussed in the preceding chapter. The king had a royal store or a *karkhana* which catered to all his needs. He had also a harem. It may be recalled that Biswa Singha had eighteen queens and his grandson Raghudev as many as hundred and twenty.¹³ Each of the queens was given a separate establishment. It was but natural that the Koch king would try to imitate the style of living of the Bengal Sultans or of the Mughal governors. Shihabuddin Talish found that king Prannarayan was "surrounded by singing women. His palace (was) regal, (had) a *ghusul khana* (a bath room), a *darshan*, private rooms, accommodations for the *harem*, for servants, baths and fountains, and a garden."¹⁴ Stephen Cacella also notes that to have access to the Koch king, he and his companions had to pass through three courts enclosed by roomy *varandah* and separated from each other by strong gates. These led into a large garden, in the middle of which stood a villa where the king awaited them.¹⁵ Items of Mughal aristocracy also enclaved in Koch court as a result of their diplomatic relations with the Mughals. Naranarayan, while offering presents to Akbar, might have received certain articles of Mughal aristocracy in return.¹⁶ Lakshminarayan too, who entered into marriage relation with the Mughal governor of Bengal, Man Singh, might have similarly got some costly articles as presents.

The nobility derived its income mainly from the lands cultivated by peasant proprietors. It monopolised all the high offices in the administration. While in office, a noble, as

already stated, got certain portion of crown land as his perquisites which was liable to be taken over by the king at his death. But in practice this rarely happened. Because appointments were usually hereditary, and except on a charge of treason, no one was evicted from his landed possession. This hereditary succession made the nobility powerful enough to play a crucial role in court politics, including questions of succession. It appears that the Koch nobility too tried to ape its counterparts in Bengal in having a large number of slaves, servants and retainers and stables of horses and elephants. Each noble had a number of wives. He had certain insignias, like silver-embroidered robe and umbrella to distinguish him from the king whose insignias were embroidered with gold.¹⁷ He had also certain privileges like those of using a palanquin, wearing shoes, turbans etc.¹⁸ On the whole, a distinction between the king and the nobility, and the nobility and the commoners was always maintained.

At the bottom was the peasantry who also formed the militia of the kingdom. As stated, a peasant generally enjoyed his land-right undisturbed and his freedom of movement was not restricted except when on military duty. He was also free to undertake any craft like weaving, spinning, carpentry, pottery, etc. to improve his lot. The land holdings of the peasants were not equal. The *Katha Guru Carit*¹⁹ informs us that while some peasants had only one *bigha* of land and no granary at all, there were others who had as many as twenty six *puras* of lands with three to four granaries and a number of ploughs. This inequality was due to several reasons. When a peasant was required to give his service as a soldier, he was allowed to have three *puras* of crown land as his perquisites. If appointed to the standing militia stationed at the capital, he would definitely hold it for a much longer period and subsequently this land became his hereditary possession, because there is no instance to show that the king had reclaimed any such land from the peasants. Besides, those families having larger number of male members or resorting to ploughing would bring more waste lands under cultivation than those having few or lesser number of male members or resorting to cultivation by hoe and stick. Further, once affluent, a peasant could purchase slaves whom he

employed mainly in cultivation. Sometimes, a poor peasant, unable to cultivate his small plot of land, had mortgaged his service to a rich peasant. Thus Paramananda, a celibate disciple of Sankaradeva, was formerly a bonded labourer against a loan of rupee one.²⁰ Another disciple Balaram was a husbandman to a rich peasant in order to repay his debt of rupees five.²¹ Thus it is found that whereas some peasants were well off, there were many who found it difficult to make their both ends meet. They were also exploited by the tax collectors. The *Katha Guru Carit* records that the revenue officers did not spare even the poorest from paying rents and that they made much profit by extracting more than the due.²²

There was also wide extent of slavery. Slaves were bought and sold in the open market. The price varied from Rs. 3 to Rs. 20,²³ depending upon caste, sex and age. Slaves were prisoners of war, condemned criminals or persons born of slaves or purchased from the hill tribes. Bondsmen not being able to repay their debt, had subsequently become slaves.²⁴ Criminals were bartered as slaves for horses in the market places attended by the Bhutiyas.²⁵ Slaves from the Koch kingdom were also exported to Bengal and the Ahom kingdom.²⁶ Slaves being private property of their master, were generally treated with kindness. The *Gurucaritas*, however, record an incident to the maltreatment meted out to the slaves by their masters. Such a slave is said to have complained that he was neither allowed to sleep at night, nor had enough food or any warm cloth; and in spite of his hardwork from morn till night, he was frequently beaten.²⁷ In between the privileged aristocracy at the top and the labouring peasantry at the bottom, there was another class of people who had formed a class of landed gentry. The Bhuyans or landlords, the tribal chiefs, the junior officers in administration like the *Thakuriya*, *Saikia* and *Hazari*, the village headman and such other petty officials constituted this class. The Bhuyans, of course, were an enterprising group of persons who used to reclaim wastelands and settle new villages over which they exercised their lordship. They collected the land revenue of the villages under their jurisdiction and received a share of it from the government. They undertook trade pursuits. They had also their own armed forces. Thus the Bhuyans were a very powerful class, and

although the Koch kings established their suzerainty over them, yet it was not easy for the government to ignore or alienate them. The living standard of the big Bhuyans were almost similar to that of the nobility, whereas the smaller ones might have lived more or less like the affluent peasants. Most of the Bhuyans apparently lived in the countryside and formed a kind of "loose dispersed local gentry". The status of the tribal chiefs appear to be lower than that of the Bhuyans as the former were lacking in adventures or trade pursuits. These classes of people usually lived in a joint family, the strength of which sometimes went upto nearly hundred.²⁸ Not much is known about the living standards of the junior officers. However, the *Katha Guru Carit* informs us that they used to keep large flock of goats and herds of cattle.²⁹ This source speaks of an official who had a large number of slaves and retainers and four to six granaries.³⁰

These apart, there was a class of religious divines and learned men, who in return for their services, were granted tracts of lands for their maintenance. Although the grants were to be renewed by every ruler, they often became hereditary in practice. The *Raja-Puruhita* or the royal priest, the *Pujaris* and the *Dolois* serving in the temples, and since the establishment of the *Satra* institutions, the heads of the *Satras* called *Satra-dhikaras*, and the court poets and scholars usually called *Pandits*, belonged to this class. Many of them held official positions like *Ujir*, *Sikdar* etc. One Kabindra Baninath, who was a poet of high repute, was even holding the office of *Patra* or minister.³¹

In the social hierarchy the Brahmins were at the top and the Chandalas were at the bottom. Along with the Brahmins, the Kayasthas, Daivajnas and the Kalitas were considered as upper caste Hindus, whereas all the tribes were considered to be of lower castes. However, all non-Brahmins were termed as *Sudras*. Although caste system in north-east India, in any period of history, was not rigid, as it had been in other parts of the country, yet, there was always a distinction between the Brahmins and the upper caste Hindus and between the latter and the lower caste Hindus. There was no inter-dining and inter-caste marriage.³² But that was not applicable in case of the rich and the powerful. Thus Pratap Ray, a Kayastha

Bhūyan, gave his daughter in marriage to Chilarai³³ and Koch princesses were given in marriage to the Ahom kings or to the Rajputs.³⁴

All people, nobles or commoners, lived in thatched houses, the distinction being maintained in design and space. It appears that the houses of the nobles, although built of bamboo and timber, were very nicely decorated and furnished with all amenities including a beautiful garden in front.³⁵ The Vaishnava literature makes mention of different beautiful and fragrant flowers like those of *jui* (*Jasminum grandiflorum*), *jai* (*Jasminum auriculatum*), *tagar* (*Tabernoemontana coronaria*), *malati* (*Asclepias volubilis*), *champa* (*Michelia champaca*), etc. which might have been there in the garden of the nobles as well as of the commoners.

Dress of the nobles and the gentry consisted of three pieces of cloth—*netabhuni* or *dhuti*, made of silk or fine cotton which covered down to the knees, *pachara* (wrapper) and *dopati* or *tana* (double-folded scarf). Towards the close of our period, items of Mughal dresses like *chauga* (waist coat), *chapkan* (long shirt), *jama* etc. made their appearance in the royal court. The common malefolk used only one piece of cloth, namely *dhuti* or *churiya*, made of coarse cotton and much smaller in size than that used by the nobles, which could not reach the knee. In the winter, however, all sections of people covered their body with an *endi* scarf. All menfolk, nobles or commoners, used a *gamocha* or towel as a part of their dress which the commoners normally tied to the waist, wrapped round the head or hanged on the shoulder. Regarding the dress of the commoners in Assam, Shihabuddin Talish observed:

It is not their custom to tie turbans round the head, to wear coats, trousers or shoes, or to sleep on bedsteads. They only wrap a piece of fine linen round the head, and a waist-band around middle, and place a *chaddar* on the shoulders. Some of their rich men in winter put on a half-coat like a jacket.³⁶

The tribal menfolk, yet to come under the pale of Hinduism, used only one small piece of thick coloured cotton cloth called *lengti* to cover the private parts of their body and in winter

wrapped a shawl, which too, was made of coloured fibre and was nicely embroidered.

It appears that the dresses of womenfolk of the nobility and the upper stratum of the society, varied region-wise. Women in the western Koch kingdom wore a single piece of cloth called *sari* whereas their counterparts in the eastern Koch kingdom usually used two pieces of cloth called *mekhela*, and *riha*. The *mekhela* was tied round the waist or above the breast to reach up to the ankles and the *riha* wrapped round the body. Silken or costly *saris* were, however, worn by the well-to-do class only³⁷ and therefore, its use was not very common. Usually in eastern Kamarupa, *sari* was looked down upon. It may be noted in this connection that when Naranarayan sent *saris* as presents to the Ahom king Sukhampha to be used by his queens, the latter made a sarcastic remark that these were quite unfit for exhibiting in a court, and only the Koches were accustomed to them.³⁸ Jackets and blouses made their appearance, beginning with the close of our period only. In winter, aristocratic womenfolk covered their body with gold or silver embroidered shawls made usually of *endi* which was called a *chadar* or *cheleng*. A tribal woman, while at home, used only one piece of cloth called *pami* or *tona*³⁹ which she wore like a *mekhela* tying it above her breasts,⁴⁰ and while at out, used an upper garment called *agran*.⁴¹

Members of the upper stratum of the society used clothes made of silk like *pat* and *muga* or fine cotton, and in winter those made of *endi*, wool or fur. Commoners could use only coarse cotton and *endi*. Most of the clothes were locally produced. Only those of wool or fur were imported from Bhutan.⁴² As a results, a number of textile centres like those of Tantikuchi and Barnagar had propped up in the kingdom during the period of our study.

Contemporary literary sources make mention of varied types of ornaments made of gold and silver inlaid with precious stones. There was a professional caste called Sonari to make such ornaments. All persons, male or female, used ornaments, the most usual of them being rings, earrings, necklaces and bracelets. Women used other types of ornaments also, called *nepur*, *gamkharu*, *kinkini*, *galpata* etc.⁴³ Ornaments of aristocracy were made of gold and those of the commoners were of silver,

nickel and coral.⁴⁴ In a like way, gold and silver utensils could be used by the upper classes only; whereas the commoners could use only those of brass, copper, clay, bamboo and wood.⁴⁵

Rice, vegetables, fish and milk constituted regular items of diet for both the rich and the poor. Meat of different animals like goat, deer, buffalo, rhino, sheep and of birds like pigeons and ducks were also eaten. The *Gurucaritas* make mention of different preparations like *akhai*, *muri*, *got-karai*, *sandah*, *pitha* etc. of rice.⁴⁶ It also refers to different kinds of pulses like *mug*, *mati*, *machur*, *arahar* etc. Besides, people also used *gur* (jaggery), oil, ghee and spices. The *Kumara Harana* and the *Katha Guru Carita* throw light on the delicacies of the upper stratum of the society.⁴⁷ That much attention was paid to the royal dish is evident from the fact that the *Supkar* was to be proficient in preparing different kinds of dishes. Besides, people cultivated plenty of oranges, bananas, guavas, coconuts, palms and other fruits and vegetables like pumpkins, cucumber, gourd etc. including leafy vegetables like *lai*, *lapha*, *suka* and *paleng*.⁴⁸ The use of betel-nut was most common among all the classes of people. The tribal people used a kind of rice beer called *mad* which they used to offer even to their deities. The non-Hindu tribes also took pork and beef. Referring to the food-habit of the Koch tribes the *Dharma* and the *Padma Puranas*⁴⁹ state that they used to take everything, which, according to the *Dharma Purana* included even beef.⁵⁰ Salt was not easily procurable, because it had to be imported from the hilly regions. Common people therefore, used an alkaline preparation from plantain trees called *khar* or *kharani* as its substitute. The practice of chewing "large quantities of betel leaves with unripe areca nuts of which the rind has not been removed" by all classes of people was noticed by Shihabuddin.⁵¹ The tribals had great abhorrence of ghee. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement, however, brought some changes in the food habit of the tribal people, as it forbade the use of the flesh of certain animals like pig and cow and birds like chicken as well as of liquor.

Position of Women

Society in north-east India, being basically tribal or greatly

influenced by the tribal elements, woman here enjoyed comparatively greater freedom than her counterparts in other parts of India. This is true of the Koch kingdom of the 16th and 17th centuries as well. Even then a distinction is marked between a woman of an aristocratic family and that of the commonality. Polygamy was the usual way among the upper sections of the society and monogamy among the commonality. Not to speak of the king and the nobility, even religious divines and *pandits* followed this practice. For example, Chaturbhuj Thakur, grandson of Sankaradeva, and who was a religious preceptor, had three wives of whom Lakshmi, the first, was a noted Vaishnava preacher.⁵² Chiefs of certain tribes like the Koch and the Mech also resorted to the practice. Hariya Mandal, father of Biswa Singha and chief of the twelve Mech families, had two wives, Hira and Jira. It is possible that members of the gentry and affluent peasants too, trying to imitate the aristocracy, used to keep two or three wives. Child-marriage was prevalent amongst the Brahmins and the Kayasthas. All others used to give their daughters in marriage only when they were fully grown up. The girl was allowed to choose her groom and it appears that even in case of settled marriages her consent was usually taken.⁵³ There was no system of dowry as well as of the *Purdah*. But these cases were applicable in case of the commoners only and particularly of the tribes, Hinduised or not. On the other hand, the contemporary literature records that the rich Bhuyans used to present even villages and cattle along with other valuable articles including gold, silver, clothes etc. to their daughters at their wedding ceremonies.⁵⁴ Amongst some tribes, there was an interesting custom of paying the expenditure of the wedding ceremony in part or full by the groom to the bride's party. The amount called '*Ga-dhan*' was paid either in cash or in kind.⁵⁵ Besides, there was the system of *Sati* amongst the upper caste Hindus. For example, Sankaradeva's mother followed this practice at the death of her husband.⁵⁶ There was no widow remarriage amongst the upper caste Hindus.⁵⁷

Daughters had no right to their father's property. A widow in a unilateral family, was, however, allowed to succeed her husband's property. Woman in the common households helped cultivation in every stage except ploughing. Besides doing the

household duties and rearing up her children, she did spinning, and wove all the clothes required in the family. Thus she shared equal, if not greater burden of the family along with her husband, keeping herself busy from morn till night. Life was thus hard for her. Those women, unable to eke out bare subsistence, engaged themselves in small trade like that of betelnut, fishing etc.⁵⁸ Some women worked as nurses or maids (*Bandis* or *Betis*) in the houses of the affluent. Some were also attached to the temples. They were proficient in dancing and were called *Devdasis* or *Natis*.⁵⁹

Women in the upper stratum of the society, depending on servants and slaves, had, on the other hand, enough of leisure and could devote their time to the learning of certain fine arts like singing and cultivating education etc. Kamalapriya, daughter of Pratap Ray, a rich Bhuyan, who was married to Chilarai, the Koch general was highly proficient in performing *Bargits* or devotional songs. It is said that her songs impressed her husband so much that he became a devotee of Vishnu and a dedicated patron of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement.⁶⁰ Girls belonging to the upper classes were also given instructions by the elder members of the family, particularly on the religious texts. Some talented girls showed equal proficiency with the boys which had enabled them even to take the responsibility of a *Satra* or get appointments in the ecclesiastical order. Thus Kanaklata, grand-daughter-in-law of Sankaradeva, was the head of a *Satra* and initiated disciples during her stay at the Bheladunga *Satra*. Again, one Dayal, wife of one Teli Krishna, a Vaishnava disciple of Madhavadeva, was appointed by the letter as the *Medhi* or the instructor, to give instructions to the queens of Lakshminarayan on religious matters.⁶¹

Women in the court used to exercise much influence in political affairs, mainly in questions of succession. Thus the step-mother of Parikshitnarayan, at the death of Raghudev, organised a conspiracy to make her son Indranarayan the king of the eastern Koch kingdom setting aside the legal claim of Parikshit. Again, it was at the suggestion of his chief queen that Naranarayan had released the Ahom hostages⁶² on the pretext of their winning a game of dice with him. It is on record that even the court nurses, on certain occasions, played significant roles in politics. Thus it was the nurse of

Naranarayan and Chilarai who arranged to communicate them the news of the death of their father and the usurpation of the throne by Nara Singha.

The high status and freedom which women enjoyed in the pre-Vaishnavite society in the Koch kingdom, as elsewhere in the Brahmaputra valley, was, however, affected by the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. This movement was in favour of a patriarchal society. It emphasised much on the chastity of woman and her submission to her husband. The story of Radhika Sati,⁶³ a Kaivarta woman, whose chastity was highly praised by Sankaradeva, used to be quoted as an ideal for womanhood even by the villagefolk till very recent times. Madhavadeva suggested Sankaradeva's wife to address her husband as 'Gosain', meaning 'lord'.⁶⁴ Several passages in the Vaishnava literature contain colophons representing women as a source of all evils. The *Katha Guru Carit* has held them solely responsible for all social vices.⁶⁵ Such conceptions had some adverse impact on the general status of women.

Rites, Customs, Festivals etc.

Society in the north-eastern India, and for that matter in the Koch kingdom in medieval times till the rise of Neo-Vaishnavite movement, was largely a continuation of the traditions of ancient period. The Brahmins, who formed the priestly class, observed different rites in connection with birth, marriage and death. It was considered indispensable for a householder of this class to perform the *panchajajnas* (the five sacramental rites) and duties relating to *yajana*, *adhyayana*, *adhyapana*, *dana* and *prati-graha*. The Kayasthas, like the Brahmins, had to observe the following six sacramental rites in different stages of their lives: *jatakarma* (birth rite), *namakarma* (naming of the child), *annaprasanna* (first feeding of rice), *chudakarma* (first tonsure), *karnabedha* (pouring of ears) and *vivaha* (marriage).⁶⁷ They were therefore, called *Sadkarmi-Kayastha*.⁶⁸ A pregnant woman, at the fifth month of her pregnancy, was offered ceremonially *panchamrita*⁶⁹ (mixture of five sweet things—milk, curd, butter, honey and sugar). The birth of a child was followed by a purification ceremony called *masa-*

suddhi-karma at the end of a month. The next ceremony was *annaprasanna* or first feeding of rice and so on.

The tribals also, Hinduised or not, followed their rites relating to birth. Thus, immediately after birth of a child, they would bring fire to the room where the mother was kept and in order to protect the house against evil spirits or *deos*, branches of thorny trees were stuck in the walls.⁷⁰ For the whole month the mother was kept in seclusion, at the end of which, they performed a ceremony called *sudir sabah*. They also had a ceremony similar to the *annaprasanna*, called *bhatsoa* and used to offer rice-cakes on that occasion by invoking the spirits of their forefathers.⁷¹ Besides, there was the custom of worshipping the goddess *Buri* when the first shaving of the hair of a child was done.⁷² This ceremony was so popular that from "the *Raja* down to the poorest man this ceremony (was) most scrupulously observed".⁷³

Among the Hindus there were also rites called *preta-karma* observed in connection with death, which included *chitadahana* (burning of the dead body on funeral pyre), *mukhagni* (putting of fire in the mouth of the dead), *dasa* or *daha* (ceremony observed on the 10th day), *masa-suddhi* (monthly ceremony), *brahma-bhoja* (feast to the Brahmins), *jnatibhoja* (feast to the kith and kin) etc.⁷⁴ The tribes either burnt or buried their dead⁷⁵ and performed these rites according to their tribal ways of worshipping the *deo* on a convenient date.

The Hindus performed their marriage according to Vedic rites. It was obligatory to consult the horoscope of the pair before settling the marriage. When a marriage was settled, the groom or his relations made presentation of dresses and ornaments to the bride. Such a contract could be broken only if both the parties agreed on the point. If one party only declined the contract, it had to pay some penalty in compensation to the other party.⁷⁶ Marriage was performed in the place of the bride except in case of the king when the bride had to be brought to the palace campus where the ceremony took place. The tribes followed their own rites in their marriages.⁷⁷

The most noted festival in the Koch kingdoms was *Durga Puja* which was performed with great pomp and grandeur. Besides, *Siva Ratri*, *Jagadhatri Puja*, *Sri Panchami Puja*, *Manasa Puja* etc.⁷⁸ were also held. Amongst the tribes also, the noted

festivals were associated with the worship of their traditional deities. These included *Mechinikhela Puja*, *Dharam Thakur Puja*, *Hudumdeo Puja*, *Gorakhnath Puja*, *Kherai Puja* etc.⁷⁹

People performed a number of festivals connected with agriculture in different seasons of the year. Most important among these was the *Bihu* which was performed in three different seasons of the year. The *Bahag Bihu* or the new year's day, observed on the *Chaitra Samkranti* and on the days following it, was the festival of merriment. During this period, young boys and girls dressed in their best, congregated in a festive mood in the open field and sang and danced for several days with the belief that dance of young persons would increase the fertility of the earth. Immediately after this *Bihu*, the villagefolk took to their cultivation. The *Kati Bihu* was observed only for one day on the last day of *Ashvin* (September-October). On this occasion a light was lit in the field and villagers offered prayers for a good harvest. In the month of January, after harvesting was over, they performed the *Magh Bihu* for several days starting from *Pausha Samkranti* which was accompanied by feasts and preparation of different kinds of cakes from rice powder. Although originally a tribal festival, the *Bihu* was accepted by all the members of the Hindu caste as well. When it came to happen is not known, but its observance as a common festival by all members of the society in most parts of north-east India, is of remote antiquity. In our period too, we have already referred as to how Biswa Singha attacked the Bhuyans when their soldiers took leave of them to celebrate *Bihu*.⁸⁰ Besides, the tribes performed a number of other festivals like the *Roa-gara Puja*, *Lakhidak Puja*, *Dhan kata Puja* and *Naya khowa Puja*, all of which were associated with rice cultivation.⁸¹

The Neo-Vaishnavite movement introduced some new festivals like *Ras-Yatra*,⁸² *Dol-Yatra*, *Janmastami* etc. Besides, the *Bhawanas* (theatrical performances) and the *Sabahas* (popular assemblage to chant congregational prayers) served occasions for social meets.

Sports and Recreations

There was also cultivation of different kinds of sports and

games in the Koch kingdom. The children and the youngfolk played with *dhop*,⁸³ kite etc. The *Katha Guru Carit* makes mention of other out-door games like *dug-dugali*, *dug-top*, *chor-bagh*, *hudu-gudu*, *ghila* and *sortang*.⁸⁴ There was culture of wrestling and yogic practices as well. Naranarayan himself took training in wrestling for which he was called Malladev (god of wrestling). The *Gurucaritas* make mention of *bali-bhat* or picnic which was participated by the young and the old alike.⁸⁵ Story-telling also was a good source of recreation to all. The princes and the members of the upper classes usually played dice and went out on hunting excursions. Naranarayan's playing with dice with the Ahom hostages had already been mentioned. Gambling was also popular among the aristocracy. Swimming and boating were popular amusements. Sankaradeva himself was a noted swimmer who could swim across the Brahmaputra when it was in its full swat in summer.⁸⁶ The Neo-Vaishnavite movement introduced the performance of *Bhawanas* and different kinds of devotional songs like the *Bargits* and dances like *Sutradhari-nritya*, *Krishna-nritya*, *Dasavatara-nritya* etc. which, while giving the people ethical teachings, provided them with amusements as well.

Economy

Agriculture was the mainstay of occupation; and all people were, directly or indirectly, associated with it. The Persian chronicles testify to the fertility and productivity of the soil in the Koch kingdom. The author of the *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, for example, observed: "Koch Behar is well known for its excellent water, mildness of the climate, its fresh vegetation and flowers. Oranges are plentiful, as also other fruits and vegetables".⁸⁷ The *Alamgirnama* also writes in the same strain, and speaks of the productivity of the Brahmaputra valley.⁸⁸

Rice formed the staple crop. It had three main varieties: *Ahu*, *Sali* and *Bao*. Shifting was the usual method of *Ahu* cultivation and it was this variety of paddy whose use was most common. Its yield was smaller than that of *Sali*, but it was short maturing. *Sali* or wet rice required transplantation and hence such fields which could retain water or could be artificially irrigated from adjacent streams were necessary for its cultiva-

tion. The Kacharis knew some techniques of irrigation.⁸⁹ They used to make dams across the hill streams and then lead the stored-up water to the fields through a net work of dug-out channels. The *Tabaqat-i-Nashiri*⁹⁰ appears to mention of that technique. But both the Koches and the Bodo-Kacharis were adept to hoe-culture and to the use of *Ahu* rice. The cultivation of *Sali* was therefore, not extensive in the Koch kingdom. The Bhuyans, however, appear to be interested in wet rice cultivation. It was at their initiative that the cultivation of this rice, including the use of the plough, was making gradual progress among the tribes. The *Yogini Tantra*⁹¹ and the *Katha Guru Carit*⁹² make reference to different varieties of *Sali* paddy like *raja*, *briha*, *soma*, *sighna*, *banga*, *rakta*, *keteki*, *asok*, *bara*, *jaha*, *mathanga*, *maigutiya*, *bar*, *lahi phapari* etc. *Bao* was a long maturing coarse variety sown in February-March and harvested in November-January. It was popular amongst the tribes. It was sown broadcast in low lands.

All the tribes in the Koch kingdom including the ruling one resorted to shifting cultivation. A vivid description of the technique given by Major John Butler in the middle of the 19th century, is applicable to our period as well.

The natives set fire in the jungle to clear the land of cultivation, and to open the through-fares between the different villages, and the awful roar and rapidity with which the flame spread cannot be conceived. A space of many miles of grass jungles, twenty feet high is cleared in a few hours. . . . The jungle is burnt down, and for three successive years two crops are annually realised from it. In February, mustard seed is gathered in; . . . and in June the spring rice, 'sown broadcast' is reaped. After the land has been thus impoverished, it is allowed to remain fallow for three years; and fresh jungle land is burnt and prepared in the same primitive way and with most simple implements of husbandry.⁹³

It may also be noted that even after the hoe was replaced by the plough, the tribes used shifting type of cultivation as late as the close of the 19th century.⁹⁴

Besides rice, people cultivated different kinds of pulses,

fruits and vegetables. Mustard seeds, arecanut and betel-vines were the common articles of trade in the Koch kingdom. Cotton also appears to have been cultivated by a large number of people. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* mentions how Hariya Mandal, father of Biswa Singha, cultivated cotton in the hilly parts of Chikanagram area.⁹⁵ Of the cultivated fruits the most common were jack-fruit, coconut, orange, mango, olive, myrobala, bananas, emblica etc. and different kinds of citrus fruits like lemon and shaddock. The *Yogini Tantra*⁹⁶ gives the names of a large number of fruits, vegetables and flowers with which the *Devi* could be worshipped. The list includes, besides those already mentioned, grape, papaya, brinjal, plum, guava, pomegranate etc. Shihabuddin Talish mentions that a large number of oranges was produced in the Koch kingdom,⁹⁷ and Stephen Cacella writes, Koch Behar is "famous for its fruits, which are better here than I have seen them in India, and especially for its oranges of every kind".⁹⁸ Bay-leaf, long pepper, *thekera* (*Garcinia*) etc. which used to be exported from the Brahmaputra valley to Mughal Bengal in the 17th century, might have been extensively cultivated in the Koch kingdom. Regarding the fruits and flowers of this part of the country, Shihabuddin Talish observes:

Many kinds of odorous fruits and herbs of Bengal and Hindustan grow in Assam. We saw here certain varieties of flowers and fruits, both wild and cultivated, which are not to be met with elsewhere in the whole of India. The cocoanut and *nim* trees are rare; but pepper, spikenard and many species of lemon are abundant. Mangoes are full of worms, but plentiful, sweet and free from fibre, though yielding scanty juice. Its pineapples are very large, delicious to the taste, and rich in juice. Sugarcane is of the black, red and white varieties and very sweet; but so hard as to break one's teeth; . . . ginger is juicy.⁹⁹

Bamboo, which was so essential in the day to day life, was widely grown, so also different varieties of timber, like *sal* (*Shorea robusta*), *sonaru* (*Cassia fistala*), *khair* (*Acacia catechu*), *agaru* (*Aquilaria agallocha*), *palas* (*Butca frondosa*), *chandan* (*Santalum*), *ajar* (*Lagerstroemia Reginalc*) etc. As sericulture was

a common occupation, the cultivation of plants like *era* (*Ricinus communis*), *chom* (*Antheroea Assama*), *nuni* ((Mulberry tree), *sowalu* (*Tetranthera macropaylla*), *kesheru* (*Heteroponax fragrans*), *champa* (*Michelia pulnycensis*), *dighalati* (*Tetranthera diglotti*), *hidal* (*Barringtonia accutangula*) etc. to feed the worms was but very natural. Besides, certain medicinal plants, like (*mahanim* (*Azadirachta indica*), *bel* (*Aegle marmelos*), *ishanmul* (*Aristolochia indica*), *satmul* (*Asparagus sarmentosus*), *silikha* (*Terminalia chebula*) etc., might have also been grown. Lac, although produced in the forest, was also cultivated to some extent. The Garos generally reared it in the *arahar* plant and others on some kinds of ficus. Tavernier states that the Brahmaputra valley is famous for production of lac of red colour which they used to dye their calicoes and other stuffs.¹⁰⁰

Crafts and Industries

Reference has already been made to certain professional communities having specialisation in their respective crafts which indicates the existence of these industries in the Koch kingdom. However, the most noted industries were silk and textile. This part of the country has a reputation from very early times for its indigenous silk—*pat*, *muga* and *endi*, manufactured from cocoon. There were professional silk spinners and weavers called Katanis in the Koch kingdom. Sualkuchi in the present district of Kamrup, which has been the most noted centre of silk industry in Assam, might have been so during the days of the early Koch kings as well. The English traveller Ralph Fitch, who visited the Koch kingdom during the days of Naranarayan, makes a reference to its silk and textile industries. *Muga* silk from Assam and Koch Behar formed an important article of trade with Bengal, Bhutan, Tibet, Mughal India and in the Coromandal and Malawar coasts.¹⁰² Shihabuddin Talish observed that once a year in normal times, large quantities of aloe wood, pepper, spikenard, musk, gold and varieties of silk were offered in exchange of salt, saltpetre, sulphur and several other products of Mughal India at the Ahom-Mughal check-posts.¹⁰³ It is possible that many of these commodities, mainly silk, came from Koch Behar as well. Besides, textile industry

was also highly skilled. As mentioned, Tantis were the professional weavers. Sankaradeva himself was appointed as the *Gomasta* or administrative officer over the Tantis of the Tantikuchi area of Barpeta. At the request of king Naranarayan, Sankaradeva had got a 60 by 30 yards large cloth woven, called the *Vrindavaniya Kapor*, depicting on it the scenes from the early life of Lord Krishna.¹⁰⁴ Kamarkuchi, famous for the production of fine textiles in early 18th century, might have worked during this period as well. It also appears that Naranpur, where the Koches and their easternmost outpost, was another noted centre of textile industry.¹⁰⁵ It may also be mentioned in this connection that proficiency in weaving was an indispensable qualification for a girl for her marriage in this part of the country till recent times. There were also families even among the high-castes who gained their livelihood by weaving. The *Gurucarita* of Daityari Thakur mentions of such a weaver couple whose daily income amounted to ten *pons* of *kowris*.¹⁰⁶ It is learnt from the same source that the professional weavers had to pay an annual tax of rupees two to the government.¹⁰⁷

Other crafts and industries included those of gold-smithy, blacksmithy, pottery, ivory works, leather works etc. Blacksmiths were mostly Koches and Kalitas. Potters were of two kinds—those using wheel were called Kumars and those not using wheel were called Hiras.¹⁰⁸ Sarthebari, the most noted centre of bell-metal and brass works, and Barpeta of ivory work, of a little later period, might have been there functioning during the rule of the Koches as well. Fishing was done mainly by the Kaivartas. But there was also a class of fishermen called Nadiyals who did not use net.¹⁰⁹ Oil-crushing and *gur* making were usually done in the households. For oil-crushing two flat boards and a stone loaded small beam were used. The professional oil men called Telis, however, used a kind of cattle-powered mill. A small mill, also pulled by cattle, was used in crushing sugarcane for the preparation of *gur*. Bamboo works and wood works were also noted crafts of our period. Different articles like baskets, winnowing fans, fans, mats, a kind of sunshades called *japis*, as well as fishing appliances and weaving implements were made of bamboo, and some of these formed

articles of trade. Stools, chairs, benches, trays, caskets etc. were made of wood and cane. Training in bamboo, wood and cane works was also given at the *Satras*. About the quality of boats of this region the author of the *Fithya-i-Ibriya* observes:

(they) build most of their boats of chambal wood; and such vessels, however heavily they may be loaded, on being swamped do not sink in the water.¹¹⁰

Regarding the technique of boat making we have the following information:

Canoes were manufactured out of trees, which were hollowed out. . . . If a large boat was required, the shell was plastered over with mud and steamed over a fire, and the sides were then distented by the insertion of thwarts . . . in this way boats 60 feet long by 6 or 7 feet in breadth were constructed, capable of lasting, if the wood be good forest timber, for 10 years or even longer.¹¹¹

Elephant catching, a high skilled job, was done by a class of trained persons, called *Phandis*. Although elephants were in high demand, there was no professional class engaged in this work. On the other hand, it was strictly under the supervision of the government.

The practice of dyeing was also prevalent among the tribes of the Koch kingdom. The art of dyeing clothes with lac was cultivated in this region since ancient times. The materials used were not only lac and indigo, but also roots, leaves and barks of trees like *majathi* (*Rubia cordifolia*), *hengul* (*Balanites roxburghii*), *jetuka* (*Lawsonia inermis*), *kenhraj* (*Eclipta elba*) and *boromthuri* (*Talauma Hodgsoni*).¹¹² Rabhas, the Bodo-Kacharis and the Garos were most proficient in this art in the Koch kingdom. The usual procedure was to dye not the cloth but the thread.

Besides, image making provided occupation to some people called *Khanikars*. The art of making earthen images, particularly of Durga, was prevalent in the Koch kingdom even before the rise of Biswa Singha. The *Katha Guru Carit*, for instance, mentions such an image of Durga worshipped by Biswa Singha

when he was still a cowherd.^{112a} The earthen images of Durga so impressed the Ahom envoys that on their return to Garhgaon, they reported it to their king who lost no time in sending his own artisans to Koch Behar to get training in that branch of art.¹¹³ The *Vamsavali* also makes mention of the *Silakutis* or stone engravers.¹¹⁴

The introduction of *Bhawanas* necessitated the making of different masks, like the ten-headed Ravana, bird-faced Garuda, fur-skinned Banara (monkey) etc. Such masks, called *mukhas*, were made from bamboo, wood, clay and cloth. These were also painted suitably with lime, vermilion, yellow arsenic, indigo and lamp-blacks.

Commercial Enterprises

Contemporary local sources¹¹⁵ and accounts left by the foreigners,¹¹⁶ reveal that the lower Brahmaputra valley, during the 16th-17th centuries, witnessed a period of transition from tribal agricultural patterns to a more advanced feudal productive systems resulting in the growth of agricultural output in the kingdom. Besides, the valleys and the hills of the north-east were always rich in forest and animal products. Industrial goods in the Koch kingdom had been extensively and qualitatively produced. All this not only encouraged the native merchant class to pursue commercial works, but also attracted foreigners to carry on trade with this region. To this may be added all encouragements accorded by the rulers,¹¹⁷ whose aim was to establish both political and economic hegemony over the neighbouring territories.

Commercial Relations with the Neighbouring Countries

The Koches had trade relations with Bengal, Assam (Ahom kingdom of the upper Brahmaputra valley), Bhutan, Tibet and China, and later with Mughal-India. Almost all native and foreign sources testify to this fact.

Trade with Bhutan was carried on through the *duars* or the mountain passes. There were seven such *duars* bordering on the eastern part of the Koch kingdom and eleven on its western

part. The Bhutiyas brought their articles of trade which included Chinese-silk, woolen clothes, yak-tails, ponies, gold-dust, and rock-salt to the market-towns on the border of the Koch kingdom and exchanged them for iron, lac, rice, silk, dried-fish, buffalo-horns etc. Fairs were held at places like Hajo, Charigaon and Odalguri, in the eastern,¹¹⁸ and Darwani, Panga, Barabhita, Badarganj etc. in the western¹¹⁹ Koch kingdom where the Bhutiyas exchanged their produces including ponies for cattle, conch shells and other products of the plains. It was through Bhutan that trade with China and Tibet was carried on. According to Ralph Fitch, the traders of the Koch kingdom brought pepper from China.¹²⁰ Pemberton, writing in the early 19th century, speaks of a place called Geegunshur, four miles distant from Chauna, laying on the Assam-Bhutan confines, which was an important commercial centre for the merchants of both the countries^{120a}. As Geegunshur is on the northern border of the present district of Kamrup, it was then within the Koch kingdom; and it is possible that trade with Bhutan as well as with China and Tibet was carried on by the Koches through this place. Referring to another important trade centre, Karampatan or Kararpatan in the north of the Koch kingdom, the *Tabaqat-i-Nashiri* observes as follows:

... and every day, at daybreak, in the cattle market of that city, about one thousand five hundred horses are sold; and all the tangahan horses which reach the Lakhanawati country they bring from that place. The route by which they come is the Mahamha-i-(or Mahanmha-i) Darah (Pass), and this road in that country is well known; for example, from the territory of Kamrup to that of Tirhut are thirty five mountain passes, by which they bring the tangahan horses into the territory of Lakhanawati.¹²¹

Trade relations with other neighbouring kingdoms like Bengal,¹²² Cachar, Sylhet, Jayantiya and Manipur were also maintained. It should be mentioned here that Naranarayan permitted the kings of Jayantiya and Sylhet to mint coins so that trade relations with those countries as well as with Bengal

would further prosper. Ralph Fitch refers to the extensive trade on cotton and cotton-fibres in Bengal,¹²³ some of which definitely came from Koch Behar. The Mughals were interested in agar wood, sandal wood, silk and textiles and carried on trade in these commodities with the kingdoms of Koch Behar and Assam.

Extent of Trade

There were both big and small traders. Big traders carrying on trade in river traffic with the neighbouring kingdoms, were called *Sadagars*, whereas smaller ones were called *Beparis*. However, the term *Mudoi* referred to all classes of traders, big or small, engaged in river traffic. The big traders usually dealt with gold, jewelleryes, silk, salt, mustard seeds, elephant tusks etc., whereas the smaller ones dealt with arecanut, betel vine, fuel wood, salt, khar (alkali), fish, vegetables etc. It is on record that big merchants invested as much as Rs. 4 lakhs as capital in their trade.¹²⁴ Traders used to form temporary partnership to trade in distant lands.¹²⁵ Thus one Bhavananda Kalita (alias Narayan Thakur) who later became a disciple of Sankaradeva and a Vaishnava preceptor, had traded with seven of his companions in Bengal, Bhutan, Garo hills and the Ahom kingdom.¹²⁶ The traders of the Koch kingdom looked upon the kingdom of Assam as "something like a Paradise for merchants, where all valuable trade commodities could be procured in good qualities and at a considerably low price."¹²⁷ This implies a comparatively better economy in eastern Assam than what was in the lower Brahmaputra valley.

Big merchants who carried on their trade through the river traffic, used to sail with boats laden with goods, sell them in distant markets and return with goods not available in the region. For inland traffic, besides porters, elephants, horses and camels were used. Sometimes, the traders themselves had opened shops in their own residences or in the market places. There were also weekly and bi-weekly markets or *hats* where usually rice, alkali, fuel wood, fruits, vegetables, fish, and bamboo and wooden furniture were sold. Small transactions on arecanut and betel-vine, were done by women too.¹²⁸

Although not very distinctly mentioned, the *Katha Guru Carit* indicates that some castes were specialised in certain trades. But that small traders usually traded in local products is clear; and these constituted vegetables, mustard oil, areca nuts, betel vines, bamboo baskets, fishing appliances etc.—all for daily necessities and within limited areas.¹²⁹

Trade Centres, Customs etc.

Important among the trade centres in the Koch kingdom were Koch Behar, the capital of the kingdom, Rangpur, Malagul, Balrampur, Karampatan, Rangamati, Khuntaghat, Dhubri, Barnagar, Pandu and Hajo. Stephen Cacella refers to the last mentioned place as the most important town in the Koch kingdom, very rich and thickly populated.¹³⁰ He also speaks of Koch Behar as having possessed many bazars or markets.^{130a} Rangamati had, in the meantime, a Portuguese settlement along with two churches.¹³¹ Besides trade centres, in the fairs held at different places and at different times, large-scale marketing used to continue for several days. The noted among the fairs were the one held annually on the bank of the Gadadhar river, in the month of Chaitra (March-April) and the one at Hajo, held on the occasion of the *Buddha Purnima* in the month of May. There were also foot-hill markets like Ranihat and Gobhahat where, the hill tribes exchanged their products like raw cotton and iron implements for dried fish, cotton and silk fabrics, bell-metal and brass utensils and such other articles of plains.

Details about price of commodities during our period is not known. However, it is learnt from the *Katha Guru Carit* that a *gamocha* (a towel) cost eight *pons* of kowries¹³² and a packet of betel-vine cost four to eight *pons* of kowris.¹³³ Contemporary Persian sources inform us that oranges used to be sold at ten for a pice in the Muhammadan camp.¹³⁴ Further light is thrown in this matter by the author of the *Fahiya-i-Ibriya*. He informs us that ghee was "sold at Rs. 14 a seer, vetch (mash) at Re. 1 a seer, opium at 1 gold mohar a tola, a pipe of tobacco at Rs. 3 Mungdal and salt both at Rs. 10 a seer."¹³⁵ But that was an unusual time. In normal times the cost of these articles must have been much lower in both the eastern and the western

Brahmaputra valley. Regarding the price of animals, that of horse only is known, which was the most costly of all animals—its price being double of that of a slave, the highest price of the latter then being rupees twenty each.

Different types of customs and duties were collected by the Koch government. The *Guru Caritas* refer to some of such duties like *hat-kar* (market tax), *ghat-kar* (taxes collected at the river outposts), *jal-kar* (taxes on fishing in the rivers) and *dan* or sales taxes, etc.¹³⁶ A class of officers, *Chokidars* or *Chokials*, were appointed to guard the outpost and collect taxes. There were also high administrative officers to look into the affairs of trade and commerce. Thus Biswa Singha, the founder of the Koch Kingdom, appointed his son Suryabar to look into the affairs of the merchants.

Trade Routes

It has already been mentioned that mountain passes provided the Koch kingdom with the routes to Bhutan and Tibet. Trade with Bengal was mainly carried on by water ways. Stephen Cacella writes that large boats from Gaur frequented the capital at Koch Behar and moved up and down for the whole year.¹³⁷ The river route down the Brahmaputra, and via Jonai from Jamalpur, and then after some distance along the Pabna river, a navigable branch of the Ganges, was very tedious. It took 25 to 35 days to complete the voyage from Goalpara to Calcutta and 33 to 43 days from Calcutta to Goalpara.¹³⁸ The overland route to Bengal ran through Goalpara, Bagwa, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Maldah and Murshidabad. Another route ran from Goalpara to Dacca through Singimari and Jamalpur. But these routes were almost impossible during the rains. There were also routes connecting Gauhati and Goalpara with Cachar, Sylhet and Jayantiya kingdoms.¹³⁹

Trade with the Ahom kingdom was mainly through the Brahmaputra. Roads were also constructed by both the Koch and the Ahom kings which facilitated commercial transactions. The *Gosai Kamal Ali*, constructed during the reign of Narayan, is the most important among them.

In the west, Koch Behar was connected with Benaras by

land routes. Huen Tsang's statement that he came via Rajmahal and Pundravardhana and crossing the great river (definitely the Karatoya) entered Kamarupa, might point to this fact. Stephen Cacella writes that during this period (*i.e.*, 1626-27) Koch Behar was frequented by the merchants from Rajmahal and Patna.¹⁴⁰ This shows how extensive trades were carried on by the Indian merchants in the capital at Koch Behar.

Medium of Exchange

Currency in the Koch kingdom consisted of *kowris*, rupees and gold *mohars*. Kowris were usually used in small and internal transactions. A special kind of fruit called almond was also accepted as money.¹⁴¹ The *Guru Caritas*¹⁴² refer to *mohars*, *taka*, *rupiya*, *aditaka* (half-rupee), *siki* or *maha* (quarter rupee), *admaha* or *duana* and *kara* or *kowri*. It may be mentioned here that the Koch kings minted coins called *Narayani*.¹⁴³ Besides a number of one-rupee and half-rupee silver coins so far discovered of dated Saka 1477 (A.D. 1555) and 1509 (A.D. 1587)¹⁴⁴, there were coins issued by all the rulers of both the houses of the Koch royal family.¹⁴⁵ The period also witnessed introduction of coins in almost all the tribal states, of the north-eastern India: the Ahom, the Kachari, and the Jayantiya kings issued coins; and these were bringing about the process of monetization in commercial pursuits. Thus beginning from the 16th century down to the middle of the 18th, the north-eastern markets became conceived of gold, silver and copper coins, and even *kowris*;—of one rupee, half rupee, quarter rupee and 1/8th rupee denominations. But that was still not the overall medium of exchanges; circulation of money was still limited and trade was largely carried on by the bartar system. Not to speak of internal transactions including those with the hill tribes, trade with outer countries like Bhutan, Tibet, and the Ahom kingdom was carried on by this system as well. Still, as pointed out by A. Guha: "The rapid increase in money supply from several sources indicated that demand for media of exchange and trade, both intra-regional and inter-regional, were increasing over the years 1500—1700."¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

From above it appears that villages were largely self sufficient and only for a very limited articles like salt, which was very dear to get, they depended upon others. The statement of Shihabuddin Talish that the people of Assam had not the habit of buying and selling of food articles in the market,¹⁴⁷ points of this fact; and his observation is largely applicable in case of the society in Koch kingdom too. The *Katha Guru Carit* mentions how one rupee was sufficient to buy all the daily necessities, including cloth, of an average family.¹⁴⁸ This shows that the cost of living was very low. Riverways were the only easy means of communications which made it impossible for the common people to think of profitable trade pursuits. Still then the period of our study is one of economic and social transition and an enterprising section, consisting mainly of the landlords, was beginning to break grounds for future commercial development of the entire north-eastern region.

REFERENCES

1. J. P. Mills, *Assam Review*, March 1928, p. 24.
2. KGC, p. 78.
3. P. C. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
4. EIM, p. 414.
5. KB, pp. (Appendix C), 119f.
6. *Ibid.*
7. KGC, p. 155.
8. DRV, v. 563.
9. See D. C. Sannyal, *op. cit.*, pp. 91ff.
10. Chandsai, according to the KGC, (p. 155), was a tailor, (also see SMCD, vv. 475-478). He was believed to have risen to the grade of an *Ata* (senior and respected disciple), SHTN, p. 117.
11. The Muslims were in temporary occupation of the kingdom of Kamata or Kamarupa-Kamata following Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah's conquest of that kingdom in A. D. 1498 till about the rise of Biswa Singha in about A.D. 1515.
12. YT, *Patal*, XIV, vv. 78-80.
13. DRV, v. 648.
14. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, pp. 66f.
15. Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

16. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* mentions that the envoy of Naranarayan was presented by Akbar with a number of valuable articles, DRV, v. 574.
17. KRB, pp. 91ff.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 92ff; also see paintings attached to the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*.
19. KGC, p. 65.
20. MSB v. 637; SHIN, p. 77.
21. KGC, p. 128.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
23. HAG, p. 265.
24. S. L. Barua, 'Slavery in Assam', *Journal of Historical Research*, No. 1, Dibrugarh University, 1977, p. 77f.
25. GCR, vv. 3460-88.
26. HCGh, p. 72.
27. KGC, p. 128; BGC, p. 113.
28. KGC, p. 65.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 65ff.
31. D. Neog, *New Light on the History of Asamiya Literature*, Gauhati, 1962, p. 135.
32. The *Katha Guru Carit* records how Madhavadeva's father was wandering in search of a groom of Kayastha caste (*i.e.* his own caste) for his daughter, KGC, p. 76.
33. KGC, p. 137.
34. *Supra*, pp. 143ff.
35. The *Katha Guru Carit* also refers to some apartments, like bathroom in the houses of the nobles, KGC, p. 97. Shihabuddin Talish makes mention of the flower gardens beside the roads in the capital city at Koch Behar, Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, p. 67.
36. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, J. N. Sarkar *JBORS*; 1915, Vol. I, Pt. II.
37. M. Neog, *Purani Asamiya Samaj Aru Samskriti*, Gauhati, 1971, p. 133. The use of *saris* by the women of the nobility is referred to even in the pre-Vaishnavite literature. The cost of the silken *saris* was so high that only the well-to-do classes could buy it. This may be well-illustrated by the following popular verse still prevalent in lower Assam:
Sari pindhe sari pindhe bhal manuhar jee
Bhal kari sari pindhe chikat (chikan) gavat di.
 (meaning, It is the daughters of the nobles only who wear *saris*; they wear it nicely around their beautiful bodies.)—B. K. Barua, *Asamar Loka Samskriti*, Gauhati, 1961, p. 150.
38. *Supra*, pp. 84f.
39. SABH, p. 372; KGC, p. 301.
40. Also called *bukh-bandha*, HCGh, p. 72.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
42. *Infra*, p. 231.

43. M. Neog, *op. cit.*, pp. 134ff.
44. HCGh, p. 72; SABH, p. 372.
45. HCGh, p. 72.
46. KGC, p. 20.
47. L. Gogoi (ed.), *Kumar-Haran Kavya*, Sibsagar, 1972, p. 41f; KGC, p. 31.
48. YT, Part II, *Patal*, VII.
49. *Supra*, pp. 5f.
50. AEALK, p. 306.
51. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, Sarkar, *loc. cit.*,
52. SHTN, p. 150; The *Katha Guru Carita* also contains evidence to that effect, KGC, p. 696.
53. KGC, p. 106; EIM, p. 540.
54. GCR, v. 2920.
55. The amount was, however, not very high; and in certain cases, it was not strictly adopted, see KGC, p. 106.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
57. Risley, *op. cit.*, p. 495. The Rajvamsis later used to discourage the practice of widow remarriage and encourage child marriage amongst themselves and thereby called themselves *kulins* or purified.
58. KGC, pp. 103, 276.
59. P. C. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 326.
60. KGC, p. 138.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 662.
62. AAAW, p. 206.
63. It is said that on their repeated failure to build an embankment on the Tembuwani river, the Bhuyans came to a conclusion that the work could be done only if a chaste woman would bring water from the Brahmaputra on a sieve and offer it there. When all other women in the area refused to do so, one Radhika alias Yogamaya of the Kaivarta caste, did it to the amazement of all, thereby proving her chastity, KGC, pp. 48ff.
64. A. Mahanta, 'Sankaradevar Dristit Nari', *Sankaradevar Chintat Pragatisilata*, Dibrugarh, 1982, p. 19; KGC, pp. 87f.
65. KGC, p. 282.
66. P. C. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 313.
67. KGC, p. 29.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
70. SABH, p. 372.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 373.
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*
74. KGC, pp. 29, 78f; SMCD, vv. 214-217.
75. Risley, *op. cit.*, pp. 499f; SABH, p. 377.
76. SMCD, vv. 1220, 380; SHTN, p. 95.
77. EIM, pp. 540f. For details see Dalton, *op. cit.*

78. KRB, p. 98.
79. M. Neog, (ed), *Pavitra Asam*, Jorhat, 1969, pp. 256f, (henceforth abbreviated as PAN); B. Rabha, *Asamiya Kristir Chamu Abhas*, Gauhati, 1982, p. 12.
80. *Supra*, p. 40.
81. C. C. Sannyal, *The Rajvansis of North Bengal*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 139ff.
82. The Madanmohan temple at Koch Behar was an important centre for institution of *Ras Yatra*, KJPK, p. 22.
83. Even the king's court was associated with this game; the king appointed an officer called *Dhopdhara* for this purpose, *supra*, p. 194.
84. KGC, pp. 29, 30, 67.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
87. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*
88. *Asiatic Researches*, II, pp. 130ff.
89. A. Guha, 'Ahom-Migration: Its Impact on Rice Economy of Medieval Assam', *Artha Vijnana*, Vol. 9, 1967, Issue No. 2, p. 144.
90. Raverty, *op. cit.*, p. 565.
91. YT, II, *Patal V*, vv. 295-297.
92. KGC, p. 655.
93. J. Butler, *Sketch of Assam*, London, 1947, pp. 21ff.
94. Guha, *loc. cit.*, p. 138.
95. DRV, vv. 53-54.
96. YT, II, *Patal V*, vv. 277-279, 316-319.
97. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*
98. Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
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100. V. Ball, (ed.), *Tavernier's Travels in India*, Vol. II, London 1925, pp. 281f.
101. Ryley, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
102. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, Gauhati, 1974, p. 52f.
103. Blochmann, *loc. cit.* Sarker *loc. cit.*
104. KGC, p. 267.
105. Madhavadeva offered a beautiful *Narayanpuriya Kapor i.e.*, produced in Narayanpur) to Sankaradeva when he was initiated by the latter to his faith, KGC, p. 86; SMCD, v. 271.
106. SMCD, vv. 1250-1251.
107. *Ibid.*, v. 1251.
108. EIM, p. 553.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 553
110. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, Sarker, *loc. cit.*
111. U. N. Gohain, *Assam Under the Ahoms*, Jorhat, 1942, p. 202.
112. S. L. Barua, Ms. *An Outline of Assam History*.
- 112a. KGC, p. 60.
113. ABS, p. 24; ABSMJC, p. 38; PAB, p. 53.
114. DRV, v. 680.

115. For example, the *Vamsavalis* (or the genealogies of the Koch kings), the *Buranjis* (the Ahom chronicles) and the *Carit-puthis* (the biographies of the Vaishnava saints).
116. For example, the *Fathiya-i-ibriya*, the *Tabaqat-i-Nashiri*, the *Baharistan-i-Ghybi* and the account of Ralph Fitch etc.
117. See KGC, p. 109.
118. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, pp. 142, 144.
119. Vas, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
120. Ryley, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
- 120a. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, pp. 181f.
121. Raverty, pp. 567f.
122. Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
123. Ryley, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
124. KGC, p. 307.
125. A. Guha, *Medieval North-East India: Polity, Society and Economy (1200—1750 A. D.)*, p. 17 (Occasional paper 19 of the Centre for Social Science Research, Calcutta, 1978).
126. KGC, p. 107.
127. SHTN, p. 79.
128. KGC, p. 103.
129. *Ibid.*, pp. 123, 250, 307, 331.
130. Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
- 130a. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
131. S. K. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
132. One packet contained one hundred bundles of betel-vines containing twenty leaves in each bundle.
133. KGC, pp. 103, 110.
134. Cf. B.K. Baruah, *A Cultural History of Assam*, Vol. I, Gauhati, 1969, p. 95.
135. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, J. N. Sarkar, *the Life of Mirjumla; the General of Aurengzeb*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 322.
136. KGC, pp. 107ff.
137. Wessels, *op. cit.*, pp. 128f.
138. S. K. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, p. 55. Vas records that in 1781, the boat-journey from Koch Behar to Calcutta and back took 20 and 52 and a half days respectively. See p. 95.
139. Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 245ff.
140. Wessels, *op. cit.*, pp. 128f.
141. Fitch states that besides accepting it as money, people also used to eat it. See Ryley, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
142. KGC, pp. 79, 128, 188; SMCD, vv. 1250-1251.
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145. Such coins are preserved in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Gauhati; and still some are claimed to have been possessed by some individuals of Assam and Bengal.
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147. Blochmann, *loc. cit.*, Sarkar, *loc. cit.*
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Cultural Development

The Koch kings were great patrons of education and literature, music and dance and art and architecture. Their rule synchronised with the introduction of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement launched by Sankaradeva and his apostle Madhavadeva. This movement, which gained wonderful popularity among the masses within a short time and opened a new chapter of cultural progress in Assam, received active patronage from the Koch kings. The Koch rule thus has a special place in the cultural history of this region.

Religion

Heterogeneous sects and beliefs prevailed in the Koch kingdom during the period under study. The non-Hindu tribals worshipped their deities and performed their religious rites according to their own ways without any interference from the government. Hinduisation till then was mainly confined to the ruling families or to certain areas, usually in the neighbourhood of the capital cities. The Koch kings, for political purposes, patronised both Brahmanic and tribal worship, although they themselves accepted Hinduism and were elevated to the status of *Kshatriyas* by the Brahmin priests. But a major change in the existing systems was brought by the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. Below a brief idea of the dominant cults and beliefs of the period along with a gist of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement is attempted.

Worship of Siva

The most popular deity of the Koch kingdom, nay in the entire Brahmaputra valley, was Siva. The Koch kings themselves were devout worshipper of this deity whose name they inscribed in all their coins. Biswa Singha even traced his descent from Siva and worshipped him by making numerous offerings at the Baneswara Siva temple (in present Koch Behar).¹ Sankaradeva was named so because he was born only after his father Kusumbar Bhuyan made offerings to god Sankara or Siva.²

The non-Hindu tribes worshipped a premordial male deity called *Batho*, *Bathau*, *Bathau-Brai*, *Bathau-Siva-Rai*, *Burha* and *Baba* etc. with *vamachara* practices³ who was accepted to Hinduism as god Siva. Naranarayan worshipped Siva according to Vedic rites. But before leading his campaign against the Ahoms in A.D. 1562 when he did it simply according to Vedic rites, there was so much resentment among his tribal population that he had to accord them permission to worship the deity according to their own traditional rites with the sacrifice of buffaloes, he-goats, swines, cocks, rice, wines and performance of dances by women.⁴ Besides, he had to pass a decree legalising the worship of the god according to tribal rites in the area north of the *Gosai Kamal Ali* as far as the Bhutan hills.⁵

Siva was worshipped in various forms like those of *Bhairava*, *Pasupati*, *Nataraja*, *Gopeswara*, and *Kirata* etc.⁶ The *Yogini Tantra*, a 16th century work, contains reference to the *Mahabhairava* Siva in which form he gave himself up to unrestrained use of wine, woman and flesh.⁷ The tribal concept that he was the god of diseases and death as well, was accepted to Hinduism in his form as *Mahakala Thakur*. The worship of Siva in this form was very popular among the Hinduised Koches of North Bengal.⁸

Worship of Sakti

Alongside the premordial male deity, the tribes had also worshipped a primordial female deity called *Burhi*, *Jakani*, *Thakurani*, *Kuri*, *Mechini*, and *Bali-Khungri* etc. The female deity was accepted to Hinduism as *Durga*, *Parvati* or *Kali*, the

consort of Siva. It is even believed that goddess Kamakhya only a Sanskritised form of 'Kamkhi' or 'Kham-mai-kha', the primordial female deity of the Bodo-Kacharies⁹ who were so numerous in the Koch kingdom. The Koch kings worshipped the deity in both her tribal and Sanskritised forms. Thus Biswa Singha made offerings to Mechini¹⁰ before his accession to the throne and later, worshipped the goddess according to the Vedic rites at the Kamateswari temple.¹¹ Naranarayan inaugurated the newly built temple of Kamakhya on the Nilachala hill with numerous sacrifices and according to the Brahmanic rites, but he worshipped the tribal goddess *Thakurani* for three days at a stretch before he started for the campaign against the Bengal Sultan (Daud).¹² The ruling class, however, patronised more the Vedic rites of the worship of the goddess in her different manifestations like *Chandika*, *Bhagawati*, *Kali*, *Tara*, *Ugratara*, and *Chihmamasta* etc. In her form as *Durga*, the goddess was worshipped with great pomp and grandeur and with the sacrifice of birds and animals, or 'when the law permits even of men.'¹³ Biswa Singha, who was a devout worshipper of the deity, is said to have propitiated her with human blood.¹⁴

Vaishnavism

Traces of Vaishnavism which existed in ancient times as evidenced by epigraphic references¹⁵ and literary sources like the *Kalika Purana*,¹⁶ are also found during the period of our study. Biswa Singha is said to have patronised this cult with gifts to its votaries.¹⁷ Besides, there is ground to believe that the dynastic title 'Narayan' of the Koch kings was adopted in imitation of the name (Narayan) of the Supreme Deity of the Hindus.¹⁸ Raghudev was a worshipper of Madhava i.e. Vishnu. He rebuilt the Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo and granted lands, slaves and servants for its maintenance. It also appears that there were scholars studying the *Bhagavata Gita*, for Sankaradeva is said to have found a manuscript copy of this text floating on the Brahmaputra while he was leaving his native place at Bardown.¹⁹ The *Yogini Tantra* gives an account of the origin of the stone image of Hayagriva-Madhava while making reference to the images at the temple of

Jagannath at Puri.²⁰ But Vishnu worship was a minor cult in the period under study and it was also quite different from that propagated by Sankaradeva, because it had close association with Tantrikism.

Tantrikism

The association of Saktism with later form of Buddhism, i.e. *Vajrayana*, "a queer mixture of monistic philosophy, magic and erotics, with a small admixture of Buddhist ideas"²¹ and the absorption into it of various rites and rituals gave rise to a cult which came to be known as Tantrism.^{21a} The kingdom of Kamarupa was one of the main strongholds of Tantrikism. Some scholars even opine that Tantrikism originated in Kamarupa itself.²² Be that as it may, during the early period of Koch rule, Tantrikism had widely prevailed in the society. *Vamachara*^{21b} practices associated with Tantrikism and belief in magic and incantation gave religion a perverted form. There were votaries who were ready to give everything in the name of the goddess. For example, The *Katha Guru Carit* relates how one Govinda worshipped the *Devi* at the cost of all his belongings and then cut out blood from his own body to offer it to the goddess as a result of which he grew as white as cotton.²³ Human sacrifice to propitiate the deity became a common practice and there was even a class of votaries called *Bhogis* who volunteered to be sacrificed before the goddess.²⁴ There also prevailed *Kumari Puja* or virgin worship with the five M's or *makaras*, i.e. *madya* (wine), *mamsa* (flesh), *matsya* (fish), *mudra* (parched grain) and *maithuna* (sexual union).²⁵ The left handed practices associated with religion were usually performed at night and the votaries came to be known later as *Aritiya* or *Ratikhowa*. There are reasons to believe that the practice was widely prevalent in the Koch kingdom. It is even believed that the *Yogini Tantra* which mainly deals with the worship of the *Devi* with all left handed practices, was composed in Kamarupa during this period.²⁶

Nathism

Another sect prevailing in the society of our period, was

'Nathism,' which is believed to be a sub sect of Saivism. Although this sect "derived its inspiration from the *Vajrayana* or in other words, the progenitors of *Natha* school hinduised the teaching of the Buddhist Tantras",²⁷ yet by challenging the caste system and superiority of the Brahmins, it had gained greater popularity. It wanted to reform Tantrikism by repudiating *Mantras*, putting emphasis on Yogic practices and cultivation of mental powers, and placing different interpretations on such fundamental Tantrik concepts as those of *Vajra*, *Mudra* etc.²⁸ It is presumed that Nathism gained ground in Assam during the rule of Pala kings of Kamarupa,²⁹ as "it received encouragement in Bengal from the Buddhist kings of Pala dynasty".³⁰ Contemporary literary sources testify, to the prevalence of the sect under the early Koch rulers. The worship of Guru Gorakshanatha, supposed to be the progenitor of the *Natha* cult, is still prevalent among the followers of Nath Sect of Koch Behar and its neighbouring regions which they use to perform in the months of *Bhadra* (July-August) or *Phalguna* (February-March).³¹

Other Minor Cults and Superstitions

There also prevailed certain minor cults like that of the worship of a snake goddess called *Manasa* or *Marai*. Among the tribals, she was worshipped as *Bisahari* or remover of poisons.³² It is, therefore, believed that the cult of goddess *Manasa* developed out of both Aryan and non-Aryan beliefs on snake worship.³³ The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* records how Chilarai worshipped this goddess by reciting *Sandahua Mantra* to get the mother of the Bengal *Patsha* recovered from a snake bite.³⁴ Another goddess of reverence was *Sitala* or *Ai*, the goddess of small-pox. She was adored with a special kind of songs called *Ai—nam* which are still sung by the womenfolk of the entire Brahmaputra valley to get someone recovered from chicken-pox or measles.³⁵

The tribes, Hinduised or not, worshipped a number of deities, both male and female. The Bodo Kacharis of present Kamrup district still worship their primordial male and female deities called *Burha-Burhi*.³⁶ Besides, they worshipped 'Bullibriu'

(river Bharali), 'Mainaobri' (goddess Lakshmi) etc.³⁷ Hinduised Koches of North-Bengal worshipped certain female deities like *Bhandani*, *Pethani* and *Tistu Bhuri* (river Tista) and male deities like *Hudumdeo*, *Rishi Kishiho*, *Balibadra Thakur*, *Grami*, *Kartik* and *Mashal* or *Mashan*,³⁸ to which reference has already been made.

People believed in astrological calculations. The *Daivajnas* played important role in the socio-political life of the people. They used to calculate a child's future immediately after his/her birth. In the royal court *Daivajnas* were associated with the court ceremonials and it was customary to consult them before launching a warfare or doing any auspicious work. Thus Naranarayan is said to have deferred the work of building the Kamakhya temple because astrological calculations had shown that the time was not favourable for him.³⁹

Besides, there were the exhibitions of Yogic feats. The Vaishnava reformer Sankaradeva himself was a great master in this branch of learning and "exhibited Yogic feats much to the amazement of the people".⁴⁰ The *Katha Guru Carit* refers to one Rati Kanta Dalai as practising *Yoga*.⁴¹ Yogic feats attracted people so much that a class of mendicants called *Yogis* emerged who wandered from place to place exhibiting Yogic exercises.⁴²

These apart, there was wide belief in magic and incantation. The *Katha Guru Carit* describes how one Khahata Sannyasi had performed certain magic rites over an effigy of Chilarai whereupon the latter fell a helpless victim to slow death.⁴³ Persian sources like the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, *Alamgirnama* and the *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* make references to the prevalence of magic and sorcery in this region. The *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* gives an interesting description of such practices prevalent in the Khuntaghat region of the Koch kingdom, in the following words:

This place (Khuntaghat) is notorious for magic and sorcery. Thus if a man takes by force a fowl from a ryot and the ryot comes to the judge for redress, and if that person is refused justice then the complainant by means of his magic and sorcery could make the accused produce the voice of a fowl from inside his stomach and thus prove the falsity

of the protestations of the accused. If a bailiff of the judge stay at a village in connection with the work of the *Dihidar* or the *Pattadar* (the tenure holder or the revenue farmer) and if in a state of drunkenness he demanded fish with violence in the evening or at midnight when no fresh fish was, available, and persisted in his demand by torturing the ryots, then they would bring some leaves of mango tree or (another tree whose name reads like *lahsura* and breathe on these leaves some words of magic and sorcery. These leaves would forthwith turn into a kind of small fish. When these fish(es) were cooked by him in a state of drunkenness, they turn into blood. As soon as they were eaten by the bailiff, he died.⁴⁴

Neo-Vaishnavite Movement

The Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam was a response to the Indian *Bhakti* movement; but it was not a mere replica of the latter nor was Sankaradeva, its propagator, apostle of any Indian Vaishnava reformer. Under the prevailing conditions in Assam, when ignorance and superstitions were widely rampant, there was no doubt, the need for rationalising men's religious attitude. But at the same time there was also the need for uniting the heterogeneous tribes and different communities through the bond of a common faith and create conditions for their harmonious living.* The repeated attacks of the Turko-Afghans resulting in the conquest and inauguration of Muslim rule in Kamarupa-Kamata or western part of the Brahmaputra valley intensified the feeling for the need of such a unity.

Sankaradeva (1449-1569) well realised the need of the society. A wonderful personality and a versatile genius, with a rare combination of intelligence, practical foresight, courage and organising ability, Sankaradeva first made a twelve year long pilgrimage to different holy centres of India and then initiated a faith conforming to the main principles of *Bhakti*. His faith was officially called *Ekasarana Nama-Dharma* as it taught devotion to one God only through simple *Nama-Kirtana*

*S.L. Barua, Ms. *An Outline of Assam History*.

or divine services in the form of community prayer. His creed was thus one of qualified monism as propounded by Ramanuja. Sankaradeva advocated the *dasya* attitude of *Bhakti* in which the votary was to consider himself as the servant of God. He had further shown as many as nine different ways for showing devotion to God. These were *sravana* (listening to the name of God), *kirtana* (chanting the name of God), *smarana* (recollection of the Lord's name), *archana* (worship of the Lord's image with flowers), *pada-sevana* (personal services), *dasya* (servant's ways), *sakhitta* (friend's love), *vandana* (obeisance) and *atmani-vedana* (resignation of one's whole body).⁴⁵ He, however, laid emphasis on the first two ways of devotion only. Like Kabir, Sankaradeva strongly denounced idol worship and did away with elaborate rituals and sacrifices and esoteric rites practised by the Saktas. He also did not consider it necessary to abandon the life of a married householder for becoming a devotee of God. In its negative aspect the new faith embodied the following code for its disciples:

Do thou not make obeisance to other gods and goddesses, nor partake of food offered to them; cast not glance on (their) idols nor enter (their) temples, lest thy *bhakti* be vitiated.⁴⁶

Sankaradeva based his teachings principally on the *Bhagavata Purana*, and hence his creed was also known as *Bhagavati Dharma*. Popularly it came to be known later as *Mahapurushiya Dharma*, because both Sankaradeva and his chief apostle Madhavadeva were extolled to the status of *Mahapurushas* or saints by their disciples. Sankaradeva's religion comprised mainly of four principles—the comprehension of the *Parami Brahma*, the all pervasive Supreme Being in the form of Vishnu as extolled in the *Vedas*, *Ekasarana* or absolute and undivided devotion to the Supreme Being in the form of Sri Krishna as extolled in the *Gita*, *sat-sanga* or fraternity of the pious divine as enjoined by the *Bhagavata Purana* and *Nama-Kirtana* or divine services in the form of community prayer. These four principles in the condensed form were *Guru*, *Deva*, *Bhakta* and *Nama*.

Sankaradeva's religion, marked by a sense of broad huma-

nism and wide democratic sentiment, had a universal appeal. It did not accept any distinction of caste or creed. Thus among his fraternity of disciples there were Govinda, a Garo; Parmananda, a Miri (Mishing); Narahari, an Ahom; Jayarama, a Bhutiya; Chandsai, a Muslim and Damodaradeva and Bhattadeva both Brahmins.⁴⁷ Among his other disciples mention may be made of Madhava of Jayanti village who was a Hira by caste and Srirama (*Ata*) and Bhabora Das who were of Kaivarta and Baniya castes respectively.⁴⁸ In his *Nama-Ghosha* Madhavadeva refers to the acceptance of the religion by people of Garo, Bhota (Bhutiya), Yavana (Muslim), Miri (Mishing), Asama (Ahom) and Kachari origin⁴⁹ who were till the time of Sankaradeva remained outside the pale of Hinduism.⁵⁰

The new religion was "an open revolt against the cold intellectualism of the Brahmanic philosophy on the one hand and the misguided Tantricists on the other".⁵¹ It was therefore vehemently opposed particularly by the priestly class who feared that their occupation as priests in the Vedic rites and ceremonies, would be affected by the simple *Nama-Prasanga* introduced by Sankaradeva. Further, they also disliked Sankaradeva's translating the scriptures into the vernacular, thereby rendering them comprehensible to all people which privilege had hitherto been virtual monopoly of the Brahmins.⁵² They therefore, lodged complaints before the Ahom king Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja alleging that Sankaradeva who was a Sudra or non-Brahmin was bringing disaster to the country by the prohibition of the time honoured Vedic rites. The king then arranged a debate between Sankaradeva and the Brahmin priests, in which Sankaradeva very successfully challenged the latter and obtained reward from the king. But the hostility of the priestly class increased day by day. Meanwhile the new creed got to its fold numerous followers. Further, its democratic outlook and the emphasis on community feeling soon appeared to be a threat to the Ahom monarchy whose principles of administration were based on despotism and crushing the individual liberty of the subject population.^{52a} On the alleged ground of negligence of duty by Sankaradeva and his disciples in elephant catching, the king ordered for their arrest. Sankaradeva managed his escape to the Koch kingdom, but his son-in-

law was beheaded and his favourite disciple Madhavadeva was imprisoned.

In the Koch kingdom also Sankaradeva had to face in the beginning the challenge of the priestly class; but he ultimately won. Highly impressed by Sankaradeva's depth of knowledge and his saintly character, Naranarayan not only established him by appointing him as the *Gomasta* or the administrative officer over the modern Barpeta region, but also donated him lands to establish a *Satra* at Bheladunga (later known as Madhupur)⁵³ near the Koch capital. Besides, Naranarayan issued a declaration permitting the free propagation of his teachings amongst his subject population.⁵⁴ It is said that Naranarayan even wanted to accept initiation from Sankaradeva which the latter declined stating that it was not his principle to give initiation to a king.⁵⁵ However, Chilarai got his initiation from the saint and became an active patron of the new creed. With such royal patronage, people from all walks of life became converts to the new creed and within a short time Neo-Vaishnavism became the religion of the people in the Koch kingdom.

Neo-Vaishnavism had many institutional aspects, and these exercised, even today, tremendous influence on the cultural, social and community life of the Assamese people. As an institution it may be considered mainly in two major aspects: the *Satra* and the *Namghar*.⁵⁶ The *Satras* were like Buddhist monasteries or *maiths*. They were originally established at places away from the humdrum of life. The first *Satra* was established by Sankaradeva near his ancestral village at Bardowa in the present district of Nowgong. Later on *Satras* grew up at all places where Sankaradeva stayed during his movements from Bardowa to Barpeta. It was, however, his disciples Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva who gave a definite shape to the *Satra* institution. In course of time large number of *Satras* were established in different parts of the country and their number far this increased when differences of opinion arose amongst the followers after Sankaradeva's death, particularly between the Brahmana and the *Sudra* followers. After the death of Madhavadeva who became the chief apostle after Sankaradeva, schism in the new creed widened and consequently several sub-sects or *Samhatis* grew up.⁵⁷

To educate the disciples in religious doctrines and to look

after the administration of the establishment, the *Satras* had different ecclesiastical order and an hierarchy of officers. The ecclesiastical order consisted of a *Satradhikara* or *Mahanta*, also called *Gosain*, *Bhakats* or disciples and *Sishyas* or laity—both men and women. There was also a special class of *Bhakats* called *Kewaliyas* who were celibates dedicating their lives for the service of God. It may be noted in this connection that the *Satra* institutions gave rise to a new priestly class who were given social importance equal to the Brahmins. Along with it the *Satras* introduced the system of worship of the saints which had its impact in literature leading to the growth of a new branch of it in the form of *Carit-Puthis* or *Gurucaritas*.

The *Satras* were centres of learning and education and guardians of religion and morality. Regular *Nama-Kirtana*, recitation from religious texts, learned discussions, performance of drama on religious themes as well as of classical dance and music and skill in some technical arts and crafts made the monastic life an ideal way of living.

The *Satras* imparted spiritual education to the villagers through the agency of the *Namghars*. The *Namghars* thus became the centres of religious life of the villagers which promoted their intellectual and cultural activities. The *Satra* functionaries very frequently visited the outlying villages and held special religious discourses and recitals in the *Namghars*. In expounding the scriptures they always brought them down to practical issues with the idea of giving the people guidance for everyday living. The community prayer held in the *Namghars*, frequent recitations and interpretations of the religious texts as well as performance of *Bhawanas* disseminated among the villagers spiritual and moral education. The *Namghar* therefore, was a very useful institution teaching the villagers good conduct, ethics, morales and even personal hygiene. Soon they became the village court trying all cases—civil and criminal.

The Vaishnavite movement brought significant changes to the society. Brahmanic rites of course, continued to exist, but priesthood was no longer the monopoly of the Brahmins. The contents of the religious texts so long confined to selected section of the society, henceforth came to be recited even by Chandalas or untouchables. Again, the new religion was a

crusade against caste exclusiveness and untouchability. It had deep sympathy for the lower castes and down-trodden classes. In it, all people, Brahmins or Chandalas, were treated as equals. Sankaradeva had again and again emphasised that even a Chandal is purged of the impurity of his caste by firm devotion to God; and sincere faith and devotion alone can uplift the soul to eternal communion with God.⁵⁸ This catholicity had a wide appeal to the lowly and the down-trodden, who had most willingly accepted the new faith. Further, as a result of its propagation, blood sacrifices and other *vamachara* practices associated with religion were greatly reduced. The English traveller Ralf Fitch, who visited Koch Behar during the reign of Naranarayan, found that the people of the capital had much abhorrence to animal killing. It was again as a result of this movement that the tribes of the valley became gradually Hinduised and learned advance civilization and culture. Diverse sections of people were now brought under the fold of a common faith which also gave them a common *lingua-franca* in the form of Assamese and a common culture. This had fostered community feeling and strengthened the bonds of social unity.

Education and Learning

Formal education, during the period of our study, as it had been in ancient times, were imparted in the *Tolas* or *Chatrasalas*. The *Tolas* were a type of residential schools kept generally by the Brahmin scholars called *Pandits*, *Acharyyas* or *Ojas* and were maintained mainly by public charity. Sankaradeva received his early education in such a *Tola* under a Brahmin Pandit, Mahendra Kandali,⁵⁹ and Madhavadeva studied under Rajendra Adhyapaka of Banduka.⁶⁰ Kavichudamani, father of Ram Saraswati, who was in the court of Naranarayan, had kept a *Tola* which was attended by students from far and wide.⁶¹ Education in the *Tolas* was restricted to the members of the higher castes as well as of the nobility. The masses, in general, had no access to them. The medium of instruction in the *Tolas* was Sanskrit and the curriculum mainly consisted of *Dharma-Sastras*, *Niti-Sastras*, *Puranas*, lexicons, grammar and *Yajamani* studies. Princes of the royal family received education under scholars attached to the court or in the noted centres of educa-

tion outside the kingdom. As mentioned earlier, Naranarayan and Chilarai received their education at Benaras under a scholar named Brahmananda. Members of different other castes also sometimes went to centres outside the kingdom for advance studies. Thus Kanthabhushana of the Maguri village near Hajo, went to Benaras for education in the *Vedanta*,⁶² and Asurai, son of Murari Chakravarty, had his education at Navadvipa and secured the title 'Bhattacharyya'.⁶³

The masses received informal education spreaded through the stories of the epics, religious beliefs and rites, folk-literature, folk-music and dance, *bachanawalies* of Dak Mahapurusha,⁶⁴ proverbs, social usages and ethics etc. Sankaradeva introduced *Bhawanas* or theatrical performances on religious themes which served as one of the most important media for religious education to the masses. Besides, the Vaishnavite prayer-songs including music and dance were other important media through which the people received moral education. Again, the *Namghars* were not simply village prayer halls, they also moulded social discipline in the village.

Contemporary literature throws much light on the prevailing system of education in the *Tolas*. It informs us that there were small cottages attached to the *Tolas* where students hailing from distant places, could be housed.⁶⁵ The students had to cleanse and keep the school building clean and help the teacher in his domestic works. There was also the custom of begging from house to house by the students.⁶⁶ Some students, not serious in their study, sometimes used to offer some presents to the teacher and obtain leave of him for some days to spend their time in the company of his fellow cowherds.⁶⁷ Serious students, on the other hand, would keep awake till late at night busy with their studies.⁶⁸ The brilliant students were, sometimes, put in charge of instruction of those who were somewhat inferior or were lagging behind in their studies. The most brilliant and intelligent of the students, was made the *Oja-Chatra* or the captain of the class, which however, by convention, went to the Brahmin students. When Sankaradeva, a non-Brahmin student, was appointed the *Oja-Chatra*, there was much resentment among the Brahmin students, and Mahendra Kandali, his teacher, had to meet the charge brought about by one of the guardians for his violation of the convention.⁶⁹ The

pupils began their education by performing a ceremony called *Vidyarambha* on an auspicious day, after which, he was taken to a *Tola* for admission. When his learning came up to a certain standard, he was allowed to leave. Before his leaving the *Tola*, the guardian of a student used to offer *dakshina* to the teacher in cash or in kind.⁷⁰

The royal court also served as a centre of learning. It may be noted that all the early Koch kings were great patrons of education and learning and their rule saw flowering of early Assamese literature, popularly called the Vaishnava literature. The Koch kings used to hold scholarly debates where scholars from different parts of the country were welcomed to participate. The *Gurucaritas* in connection with Sankaradeva's scholarship, refer to many of such debates held in the court of Naranarayan.⁷¹ The scholar or the groups of scholars who won the debate, or who could evidence his scholarship, was conferred titles like *Vidyavagish*, *Siddhantavagish*, *Acharyya*, *Kandali*, *Bharati*, *Kavindra*, *Kaviratna*, *Bharat Bhushan*, *Bharat Chandra* etc. Thus Naranarayan conferred the title *Kavindra* on one of his court scholars, Baninath,⁷² and *Saraswati*, *Bharat Bhushan* and *Bharat Chandra* on Aniruddha Dviya.⁷³ Ananta Kandali got his title *Kandali* for his mastery over *Tarka-Sastras*,⁷⁴ and Baikunthanatha was conferred the title *Kaviratna* by the scholars of Barnagar.⁷⁵ Besides titles, the winning parties in the scholarly debates, were awarded presents, certificates (*jaya-patra*) or medals (*bana*), and the vanquished party had, sometimes, to relinquish their titles and honours.⁷⁶

Biswa Singha, the founder king, was a patron of education and literature. As we have elsewhere pointed out, the famous Tantrik work *Yogini Tantra* might have been composed during his time. His sons Naranarayan and Chilarai, who had their education at Benaras, were themselves a great source of inspiration to the scholars and poets of the kingdom. As recorded by the *Maharaja Vamsavali*, Naranarayan himself was the author of the famous work called *Malladevi Abhidhana*.⁷⁷ Besides encouraging religious literature, he had also patronised studies on secular subjects. Thus it was under Naranarayan's orders that Bakul Kayastha wrote the *Kitavatmanjari*, a book on arithmetic, land-surveying and book-keeping; Purushottam Vidyavagish compiled his famous Sanskrit grammar, *Prayoga-*

Ratnamala and other lexicons; Sridhara composed his works on astrology, *Sandhya-khanda*, *Jyotirmala* and *Barshakritya*; Kavi Karnapura wrote his *Chandas-Sastras*, *Vrittamala*; Bhattadeva wrote his *Katha-Bhagavata* and *Kaiha-Gita*, both in prose; and Pitambar Siddhanta Vagish, his numerous works on astrology.⁷⁸ It was at the instance of Naranarayan and Chilarai that Ram Saraswati not only translated the major portion of the *Mahabharata* into Assamese verse⁷⁹ but also wrote the *Vyadha-Carita* and translated the *Gita-Govinda* into Assamese verse.⁸⁰ The Koch kings also encouraged studies on the *Smritis*. There were already *smirti* works like *Brihad-Gangajala*, *Smriti-Sagara* and *Dasakarma-Pitaka*—all by Damodara Misra who lived in the 15th century. Certain other works like the *Smriti-Gangajala* even shows that there developed a Kama-rupi school of *Smriti* literature. Pitambar Siddhantavagish, already referred to, who was in the court of Naranarayan, added to this branch by compiling as many as eighteen *Smriti-Nivandhas*⁸¹ including *Grahana-Kaumudi*, *Samkranti-Kaumudi*, *Pitrikritya Kaumudi*, *Ekadasi-Kaumudi*, *Dasakarma-Kaumudi*, *Sraddha Kaumudi*, *Tirtha-Kaumudi*, *Durgotsava Kaumudi*, *Gudhartha-Kaumudi*, *Sivaratri-Kaumudi* etc.⁸² The tradition of encouraging education and literature was continued by the successors of Naranarayan till the end of their rule. Thus it was at the instance of Lakshminarayan, that Govinda Misra translated the whole *Bhagavata Gita* into Assamese verse, and one Vipra Visarad translated the *Virat*, *Vana* and *Karna Parvas* of the *Mahabharata*.⁸³ It is said that Raghudev took with him the three important court *Pandits* of Naranarayan, Pitambar Siddhantavagish, Purushottam Vidyavagish and Vyaskalai to Barnagar when he established his headquarters there.⁸⁴ Among the *Kaumudis* of Pitambar Siddhantavagish, already mentioned, some of them might have been written under the patronage of Raghudev who had established him with grants of lands, slaves and servants.⁸⁵ The same patronage was extended to the scholars even during the times of Parikshit and his brother Balinarayan alias Dharmanarayan who was established as a vassal by the Ahom king in Darrang. It was at the instance of Parikshitnarayan and Balinarayan that Damodara Misra translated the *Salia-Parva* of the *Mahabharata*. Besides, Sagar Khari, who was an astrologer by profession, got patronage

from them and composed the *Kurmawali Badh* in verse.⁸⁶ The example set in by the early Koch kings was also followed by some members of the nobility as well. Thus Madhavadeva, the chief apostle of Sankaradeva, translated the *Namamalika* into Assamese, which was originally written by Purushottam Gajapati of Orissa, at the request of Birupakshya Karji, the chief minister of Lakshminarayan.⁸⁷ The tradition of writing biographies of the leading Vaishnava reformers beginning with Sankaradeva appears to have started towards the later part of our study. These biographies, called *Gurucaritas* or *Carit-Puthis* already referred to, throw valuable light on the socio-economic history of the 16th and 17th century Assam.

The Vaishnava reformers got special patronage from the Koch kings. Most of the literary works of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva had been produced under the patronage of Naranarayan. Sankaradeva completed his *Kirtana-Ghosha*, the *Bible* of the Assamese Vaishnavas, during his stay in the Koch kingdom which he started writing while he was in the Ahom kingdom, and translated the *Bhagavata Purana* into Assamese verse at the instance of Naranarayan. Again, it was at the direction of this great king that Sankaradeva wrote his another famous work, *Gunamala*, a summary of the *Bhagavata Purana*. In a like way, it was at the instance of Chilarai that Sankaradeva got the *Jama Purana* translated by Madhavadeva and himself composed the drama *Rama-Vijaya*, which was staged at the theatre hall built by the Koch general. Even after the death of Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva continued to receive patronage from Lakshminarayan, son and successor of Naranarayan. Madhavadeva's *Nama-Ghosha*, which is as popular as the Sankaradeva's *Kirtana-Ghosha*, among the Assamese Vaishnavas, was composed in Koch Behar when Lakshminarayan was ruling there.⁸⁸

The patronage accorded by the Koch kings inspired the Vaishnava reformers to compose a large number of dramas, popularly known as the *Ankiya-nats* or one-act plays. Besides the *Rama-Vijaya*, already mentioned, Sankaradeva composed other one-act plays like the *Kaliya-Damana*, the *Keli-Gopala*, the *Patni-Prasada*, the *Rukmini-Harana* and the *Parijat-Harana*. The example was followed by his disciple Madhavadeva who is credited with the composition of dramas like the *Arjuna-*

Bhanjana, the *Chor-Dhara*, the *Pimpara-Guchuwa*, the *Bhojana-Vihara* etc. Since the performance of an *Ankiya-nat* was always accompanied by music and dance, the period of the Koches saw creative works in this field as well which would be discussed in another context.

Although the Vaishnava reformers propagated their teachings and usually wrote in the vernacular language, they did not completely neglect the study of Sanskrit. Sankaradeva himself was an erudite Sanskrit scholar, so was Bhattadeva, Sankaradeva's contemporary. The former composed his *Bhakti Ratnakara* and the latter his *Bhagavata Bhakti Viveka* in Sanskrit under Koch patronage. However, Sankaradeva preferred to compose his dramas and prayer songs called *Bargits* in *Vrajwali*, a mixed Maithili-Assamese. Even this type of propose "is embellished and enriched with homely imageries and natural speech modulation."⁸⁹

In the field of folk-literature also in which this part of the country is very rich, the Koch kings extended their patronage. This literature included mainly *Ai-nam*, *Bia-nam*, *Bihu-git*, *Ban-git*, *Nawariya-git*, *Nichukani-git*, *Dehbicarar-git*, *Tokari-git*, ballads like those of *Phulkonwar* and *Manikonwar*, *Janagabharu*, *Pagala-Pagali* etc. Most of these, particularly *Dehbicharar-git* and *Tokari-git* including different tales were now influenced by Vaishnava ideas.

Writing Materials

Writing materials of our period consisted of *sanci-pat*, *tula-pat*, ink, pen, bamboo sticks, chalks, stones etc. The *Yogini Tantra* mentions earth, barks and leaves of trees, gold, copper and silver among other writing materials.⁹⁰ The use of *sanci-pat* as writing material, prepared from the strips of the bark of *sanci-tree* (*Aquilaria Agallocha*) was most extensive. The process of preparation of *sanci-pat* was very elaborate and time-taking.⁹¹ Sheets of *sanci-pat* were of different sizes, varying from 9" to 28" in length and 3" to 18" in breadth. *Tula-pat*, mostly used in connection with painting, looked more like fine lint than paper and was made by ginning, felting and pressing cotton into the sheets. Sometimes, silk treated with *matimah* (*Phascolus radiatus*) paste, palm leaves treated with a lacresin

and smoothened animal hides were also used as writing materials.⁹² Painting materials usually consisted of *hengul* (vermilion), *haital* (yellow orpiment), indigo, lamp-black, chalk, brown ochre (*gereo*), collerium etc. Ink used for writing was of a very fast colour and as deep as Chinese black. It was also water-proof, and did not fade even after long exposure. The main ingredients of ink were *silikha* (*Terminalia chebula*) and bull's urine;⁹³ and sometimes even the sap of earth-worms was also used as ink.⁹⁴

Pen and pencils were made of reed, bamboo and wood, animal horns etc. These were known as *lekhani* or *kap*. The *Yogini Tantra* makes mention of some pens and pencils made of copper, bell-metal, iron and gold.⁹⁵

Assamese scripts which have already been much developed, had by that time three distinct styles: the *Garhgaya*, the *Bamuniya* and the *Kaithali* or *Lohkari*. The *Garhgaya* style was used in the Ahom capital at Garhgaon for purposes of administration (later, in *Satra* circles also), while the *Bamuniya* style was used by the Sanskrit scholars in the copying of the Sanskrit lore. The inscriptions in Sanskrit, were also written in the latter style. But in western Assam the most widely used style was the *Kaithali* or *Lahkari*, developed at the hands of the Kayasthas; and it was this style which was used by Sankaradeva. The noted work, *Kitavatmanjari*, to which we have already made a reference, was found written in this style.

Technical Sciences

Technical sciences, like medicine veterinary and physical science also received patronage from the Koch kings. The royal physician was called *Vaidya*. The royal cook, called *Supkar*, was also expected to have a good knowledge of medicine.⁹⁶ There was a professional class of medical men called *Bej* who treated diseases with medicinal herbs and incantations. It was therefore, among them that Ayurvedic treatment were cultured. The *Gurucaritas* contain reference to a kind of medicinal oil called *Mahanarayan tel*⁹⁷ prepared by some villagers who obviously had some knowledge of *Ayurveda*. That veterinary science received great attention from the Koch rulers, is evident from the statement of Ralph Fitch who found veteri-

nary hospitals in the kingdom. It is also believed that Sagar-khari composed his famous *Ghoranidan*, a treatise on diseases of horses, under the patronage of the Koches.⁹⁸ Engineering skill of the period is proved by the rebuilding of the temples of Kamakhya and Hayagriva-Madhava, construction of roads like the *Gosain Kamal Ali*, excavation of a number of channels and straightening of the course of the Brahmaputra near Hajo.

The rule of the early Koch kings is marked by remarkable development in the field of music and dance. That this branch of science had been well cultivated since ancient time in this region, is proved by archaeological and epigraphic records of the ancient kings, as well as by literary sources like the *Kalika Purana*, where references to one hundred and eight *mudras* with which the *Devi* could be worshipped, are given.⁹⁹ The *Charyas*, written from 8th to 11th centuries by the Buddhist *Siddhas*, were tuned to different classical *ragas* and they exercised much influence upon the people before the rise of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. The reign of Biswa Singha saw the introduction of the *Oja-Pali* music and dance. In this type of musical performance, songs from the *Ramayana* and the *Manasa Kavyas*, the former composed by Durgavar and the latter by both Durgavar and Mankar, were used to be sung by a group of singers under the guidance of a leader called *Oja* on the occasions of some festive gatherings like the *Durga Puja* and the *Manasa-Puja*. Another noted poet, Narayandeva, also composed a large number of *Manasa*-songs, known as *Sukanani*. The *Oja-Pali* which were songs tuned to classical Indian *ragas* like *gunjari*, *patamanjari*, *devamohana*, *mandali*, *meghamandala* etc. had great popularity among the masses; and it was because of this that Sankaradeva accepted this type of performance to his *Satriya* music and dance.

The tendency to deify the *ragas* which took definite shape in northern India in the 16th and 17th centuries was prevalent in Assam too.^{99a} Ram Saraswati, who received Naranarayan's patronage, used *raga-lakshanas* on his rendering of the *Gita-Govinda* to Assamese verse. Chilarai, the Koch general, who was himself a musician, quoted *raga-lakshana* from *Sangita-Damodara* of Subhankara in his musical work, *Sarawati*. The popular *raga-malitas* prevalent in this part of the country, however, differed from the *raga-lakshanas* as given on the Sanskrit

treatises on music and had an indigenous growth. There are also grounds to believe that the *Vadya-Pradipta*, a 17th century Assamese work on music, preserved in the DHAS, Gauhati, was composed in the Koch kingdom.

With the growth of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, a new era in the history of Assamese music dawned. Different forms of music introduced by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, included mainly the *Bargits*, *Ankargits*, *Kirtan-Ghosha*, *Bhatima*, and *Nam-Ghosha*. These songs especially the *Bargits* and the *Ankargits* were tuned to classical Indian ragas like *Ahira*, *Asowari*, *Bhupali*, *Varari*, *Belowara*, *Bhatiyali*, *Dhanasri*, *Gandhara* etc.¹⁰⁰ In order to maintain the rhythm or the *tala* of the music, certain instruments like *khol*, *mridanga*, *tal*, *dotara*, *tokari*, *daba* (cattle-drum), *khanjari*, etc. were widely used.

Of the dances which were prevalent before the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, the most important was the *Nati-nach*, which was similar to the *Devdasi-Nritya* of south India,¹⁰¹ and *Deodhani nach*¹⁰² performed on the occasion of *Manasa Puja*. There are also evidences of the *Putala-nach* or puppet dances. That different types of dances were cultured at least by the upper section of the society is proved by the fact that Sankaradeva's father Kusumbar had been called a *Gandharva* incarnate.¹⁰³ Sankaradeva introduced a large number of dances based on religious themes, like *Sutra-bhangi* or *Sutradhari nach*, *Krishna bhangi* or *Gosai pravesar nach*, *Gopi-bhangi* or *Gopi-pravesar nach*, *Chali nach*, *Natuwa nach*, *Rasa-nritya*, *Yudhar nach* and *Bhawariya nach* etc. By all this Sankaradeva created a new type of music and dance which can rightly be termed as the *Kamarupi* or the Assamese school of Indian music and dance.

The *Satras* themselves were important centres of music and dance. The *nama-prasangas* were accompanied by the *Satra* orchestra or the *Gayana-Bayana*. The *Satra* used to impart training in vocational religious songs as well as on instrumental music and dances. The leader or the teacher of vocational music was called *Gayan* and that of instrumental music was called *Bayan*. Besides imparting training in the *Satras*, the *Gayana-Bayanas*, sometimes used to visit the neighbouring villages and train the villagers in *Satriya* music and dance.

The tribes had their own music and dance. Their dance can be broadly divided into two: agricultural and ceremonious.

That Bihu, originally a tribal festival, was gradually accepted by all classes of people to make it national festival of the Assamese in course of time has already been referred to. The tribals performed their music and dance associated with agriculture at the time of the first sowing of seeds, before starting harvesting and in the community feast held after the completion of the harvest and on such other occasions. Ceremonious music and dances included those performed on the occasions of birth, marriage, death and worship of different deities.

Architecture, Sculpture and Painting

In the field of architecture and sculpture, the period of the early Koch kings were important for rebuilding of two noted temples of north-eastern India—the Kamakhya temple on the Nilachala hill at Gauhati and the Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo. The architecture of the Kamakhya temple belonged to different periods, and it is therefore, difficult to give any comment on them. The general structure of the temple conforms to *Sri-Chakra* plan and has the *Nat-Mandir* or *Mandapa* (main temple), the *Gapuram* (the gate way) and the *Garbhagriha* (sanctum). The *Sikhara* of the temple which resembles a bee-hive, is a combination of *nagara* and *vesara* type. This was a creation of the Koch artists and can be termed as the 'Nilachala-type'. The lower part of the temple-structure consists of some sunken panels alternating with plasters. The plinth of the temple shows mouldings of the older temple. While the plinth of the main temple has been covered by the levelling of the courtyard, that of the sanctum can be seen inside a shallow pit lined with stone. The inside wall of the temple contains the images of Naranarayan and Chilarai and an inscription recording its rebuilding by Chilarai in A.D. 1565 during the reign of Naranarayan. The main gateway was also built at the same time. It has a pointed arch and the wall surface is decorated with lotus-medallions and heralding looking lions.¹⁰⁴ A number of beautiful sculptural designs are seen on the plinth of the wall as well as in the temple premises. But according to the opinion of the scholars on the field, they belong to an earlier period.¹⁰⁵

The temple of Hayagriva-Madhava¹⁰⁶ at Hajo contains an inscription recording its rebuilding by the Raghudev (in 1505

Saka, 1583 A.D.) and giving the name of the artisan, Sridhara.¹⁰⁷ The temple is built on a hillock and a flight of stone steps composed of slabs, leads to the main precincts of the temple. The general structure of the temple is similar to that met elsewhere in the western part of Assam. It is built with stone and is octagonal in plane. It measures about 30 ft. in diameter and crowned with a pyramidal roof. It appears "from the disarrangement of many of the mouldings and cornices, and awkward position of several bas-reliefs, that the upper portion of the temple has been reconstructed from the old materials, without much precision of arrangement".¹⁰⁸ There is a *varandah* measuring 40 ft. by 20 ft. built of bricks and supported by brick pillars. Possibly the *varandah* was built by Raghudev.

Vertically the temple consists of three parts: the high plinth, the middle portion and the *Sikhara*. A row of elephants, *gajaratha*, appears on the plinth moulding. About 2 ft. above the plinth, another row of caparisoned elephants 16" in height, finely designed and executed, showing only their tusks, trunks and front legs appear in reliefs which encircle the temple and bears full brunt to the edifice. The plinth moulding is identical with the decorative style of the Kailasa cave temple at Ellora.¹⁰⁹

The *Garbhagriha*, a crypt measuring 14 ft. square, contains the image and its pedestal. The door-case is formed of four blocks of granite, and measures 10 ft. in height and 5 ft. in breadth. A lotus is engraved over the lintel of the door in the entrance. The door opens into an anteroom, also stone, 10 ft. by 10 ft., having inches of 4 ft. square, stone screens, one on each side with apertures for the admission of light and air, cut in form of lotus flowers.¹¹⁰

The upper walls of the exterior of the temple contain life-sized human figures, mostly males, including that of Lord Buddha standing 9th among the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu engraved thereon. The peculiar feature of these figures is that everyone of them holds a trident. The *Sikhara* of the temple has a pyramidal plane face which continues right up to the apex point.

There is another temple called *Bhairav-than* built on the Bhairav hill in the present Goalpara district of Assam by

Naranarayan and Chilarai. The temple conforms to the general structural plan of the Kamakhya temple. It contains images of Bhairava, Bhairavi, Radha-Krishna and some other minor deities. An inscription in a stone slab in western Nilachal hill records that the temple of Pandunath was built by Raghudev, which, however, is not in existence now.¹¹¹

There are a number of other temples in Koch Behar; but as they are ascribed to later Koch kings, they do not come under our purview. The author of the *Fathiya-i-Ibriya* refers to beautiful spacious palace buildings,¹¹² but no remains of them exist. They were most probably built of timber and wood. On the other hand, Stephen Cacella observed that the buildings in Koch Behar possessed nothing that was striking.¹¹³ By the term 'buildings' Cacella probably meant those made of stone or brick, which had no special architectural design or beauty.¹¹⁴

The temples built by the early Koch kings were of stone and brick, although in all the temples built by the later Koch rulers, bricks were extensively used. The Koch kings appointed a class of artisans called 'Kumars' to make bricks. According to the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*¹¹⁵ the bricks were baked in ghee before they were used in the construction of buildings.

According to S. K. Chatterji, Assam's early art and sculpture was but an extension of those of Bihar and Bengal; and even the early and later medieval Hindu sculpture of the land bear a pan-Indian Hindu tradition.¹¹⁶ But in the field of architecture and sculpture Assam followed more north-Bihar and mid-India than the neighbouring Bengal. To quote K. N. Dikshit, "The affinities of Assamese art would seem to be more with the schools of Bihar and Orissa than with the contemporary Pala art of Bengal. This is not unnatural as of the streams of influence that have moulded the culture of Assam, the strongest current has always been from north Bihar and mid-India."¹¹⁷

The artists in the Koch kingdom, before the rise of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, failed to contribute anything significant or original in the field of architecture and sculpture. The temple buildings of the period betray a composition of *nagara* and *vesara* designs as evidenced in the *Sikhara* of the Kamakhya temple. The outcome is a new style no doubt, but not very pleasing or refined. In the art of sculpture, circums-

tances were not very propitious for the Koch artists. On one hand, there was the establishment of the Muslim power in Bengal with a possible danger of iconoclasm and on the other hand, the Ahoms who had established themselves in eastern Assam, preferred wood to stone and brick as a medium for architecture and sculpture. To quote S. K. Chatterji:

The establishment of Muslim power in Bengal and the advent of the Ahoms in East Assam both brought in a setback of the art traditions of Assam, and after a period of decadence when lifeless and often grotesque imitations of images in the old style continued, a new style, probably of Bodo rather than Ahom inspiration, manifested itself, characterised by a rude and quite a pleasing vigour. . . .¹¹⁸

His observation is also applicable in case of the images of Naranarayan and Chilarai engraved on the wall of the Kamakhya temple as well as of the images of the Hayagriva-Madhava temple except its *gajarathas* (rows of elephants) which are of much earlier period. To conclude, there is nothing special or striking in the architecture of the early years of the Koch rule which can be termed as Kamarupa or Assam school.

The situation, however, changed with the rise of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. Under the guidance of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva and with royal patronage, the artists of the period developed a new style which can be termed as the 'Satriya-School' of architecture and sculpture. The *Satra* artists took indigenous products like timber, bamboo and thatch as a medium, and introduced a new type of buildings to serve the religious cum intellectual needs of *Satra* institution. The main building of a *Satra* consists of *Karapat*, *Namghar* or *Kirtanghar*, *Manikut*, *Hati* and the residence of the *Satradhikara* or the *Mahanta*. Besides, there was a *Bat-chara* or gate house, an open small building of two roofs located a few hundred feet away from the *Kirtanghar*. The *Karapat* was the gate-way, built in the style of a small house. In some *Satras* there were four *Karapats* leading to the *Namghar* from four different directions. The *Namghar* was a very commodious building 50 to 180 ft long¹¹⁹ with wide *varandah* on the two sides parallel to the length. The *Manikut* was a small building in which was placed

the *Simhasana* or *Thapana* which contained the main object of worship.* Around the *Thapana* were placed many sacred objects. The *Hatis* were groups of huts on the four quarters of the *Satra*-compound where the *Bhakats*, celebrate or married, lived. The *Satradhikara's* residence was attached to the eastern *Hati*.

The *Satra* buildings were constructed on *bhaj-ghar* or bent-roofed style. The truss of the roof of the *Kirtanghar* was covered by thatches and was supported by timber pillars 9-12ft. in circumference. The original *Kirtanghar* at Barpeta *Satra*, built under the patronage of the Koch king Raghudev, and at the instructions of Madhavadeva and his chief apostle Mathuradas Budha Ata, was a masterpiece of wooden works. The *Katha Guru Carit* records that its walls were set up with bamboo and wood with windows (*kundraksha-jala*) in proper places. These and the posts were then decorated with mica (*balicanda*) and tin folios (*rangpata*). *Kharimati* or chalk and adhesive substance extracted from wood-apples were then used to make them glittering. The carpenters made floral designs (*lata-phul*) on the main gateway. Besides, two statues of Jaya and Vijaya, the two gate-keepers of Vaikuntha, were worked on wood and were placed on the main gate-way.¹²⁰ But this *Kirtanghar* got ablazed after Madhavadeva had left for Koch Behar in the last quarter of the 16th century. So, the *Kirtanghar* was rebuilt by Mathuradas Budha Ata. The new building, as stated in the *Gurucaritas* was also nicely decorated with many images and scenes, executed in wood and ivory, taken from religious texts.¹²¹ The front of the *Kirtanghar* was provided with a rounded slanting roof like that of the Kamakhya temple. The ridge of the *Kirtanghar* and the *Manikut* was provided with a roofed garret over it, called the *stupa* or *tupa*, where the influence of the Dravidian architecture is seen.¹²²

Painting

Painting reached high watermark during the rule of the Koches. The walls and pillars of the *Namghars* were very

* In passage of time an image of Lord Krishna was placed in some *Satras*.

nicely painted. Sankaradeva himself was a skilled painter. The *Gurucaritas* record how he painted the scenes of the seven Vaikunthas on the ginned cotton paper (*tula-pat*) to be used as a screen for the theatrical performance of his drama *Chihna-Yatra*. Not to speak of wall paintings, this was also the period which saw the new art of manuscript painting. The most important of the early illustrated manuscript was the *Bhagavata Purana X* by Sankaradeva.* This work, according to many scholars, had an all-India affiliation in its technique and finish. Even then, as pointed out by Moti Chandra, "the lyrical draughtmanship, simple composition, dramatic narration and splendid colours give the Bhagavata illustrations a charm which distinguished them from similar Bhagavata-paintings from Udaipur and elsewhere."¹²³ On another occasion, the *Gurucaritas* record that Sankaradeva painted an elephant with vermilion and yellow arsenic on a small piece of paper and pasted it on a wooden book-case with his *Gunamala* which he had presented to Naranarayan.¹²⁴ It has also been mentioned that he had the scenes of Lord Krishna's childhood woven into a sheet of cloth 180ft. long, called *Vrindavaniya Kapor*. Another illustrated manuscript of the period is Ram Saraswati's *Mahabharata (Udyoga Parva)* wherein the artist painted the ornaments with real gold. Even before Sankaradeva, Madhav Kandali, a 14th century Assamese scholar, had his *Ramayana (Lanka Kanda)* painted in *tula-pat*.¹²⁵

The artists of the period used several compositions of colours; but the treatment was always flat. There was certain limitations on this art which is seen even in the illustrated *Bhagavata-Purana*. For example, physiology is not given due attention and physiognomy scarcely shines bright. "Landscape or any other background is scarcely or never attempted; and perspective seems to be a thing till now unknown to the painter, as the third dimension is nowhere in evidence. Successive scenes have been flatly depicted on the same plane like those in celluloid ribbons of cinematograph but without anything to mark one from another. The peculiar way of representing pouring rain-water, rivers and lakes are of a conventional type. Mountains look like cross sections of them. The trees are far

* This work is now published with the title *Chitra-Bhagavata*.

from the real. The chariots (*rathas*) are not very happy in that they look like a low, flat stool with wheels at the bottom and a flag post at the front."¹²⁶ Even then the animals, the typical being the maneless Indian lion and the *Methun* (Assamese bison) and birds are done in a clear and sympathetic manner. In the illustrated *Bhagavata Purana*, there is a rhythm in the scenes of Musical performances of *Gandharvas*, *Apsaras* and *Vidyadharas*. Attempts at symmetry are evident and movements of groups are effectively depicted. These are the most salient features of the Assamese branch of medieval painting under the Koch patronage which inspired the artists of the Ahom period to paint work like the *Hasti-Vidyarnava*, considered as a unique contribution to the domain of Indian painting. The tradition was continued by the later Koch kings under whose patronage the illuminated manuscript, *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* was produced.

REFERENCES

1. According to the Ms. *Rajopakhyana*, Naranarayan rebuilt the Banaswara Siva temple which had a remote antiquity, and named the place as 'Gerd Sandara'. Prannarayan (1632-1665) had rebuilt it with necessary modifications, KJPK, p. 53. The temple is still in extant.
2. KGC, p. 20.
3. SHTN, p. 82; M. Neog, (ed.), *Pavitra Asam*, Jorhat, 1969, p. 257 (henceforth abbreviated as PAN); B. Rabha, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
4. DRV, v. 327.
5. *Ibid.*, vv. 336-337.
6. YT, III, *Patal* IV, vv. 3-22.
7. *Ibid.*, *Patal* XIX; B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, Calcutta, 1967, p. 20.
8. *Indian Culture*, Vol. IV, No. II, pp. 24ff; cf. M. Neog, (ed.), *Studies in the History of Assam*, Jorhat, 1973, p. 171.
9. Rabha, *op. cit.*, p. 12; PAN, p. 257.
10. DRV, v. 102.
11. *Ibid.*, vv. 217-218.
12. *Ibid.*, v. 548.
13. Sir Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. I, London, 1921, p. (Intro) XXXVI, cf. SHTN, p. 82.
14. DRV, v. 82; KGC, p. 60.
15. *Baraganga Inscription* (A. D. 553-554) of Mahabhuti Varman (lines

- 1-2) *Nidhanpur grant* of Bhaskaravarman (L. 34); See M. M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Gauhati University, 1978, pp. 6, 50ff.
16. KP, Chapter 88.
17. HAG, p. 50.
18. SHTN, p. 88.
19. SWCD, vv. 184-185; KGC, p. 55.
20. YT, II. *Patal* IX, vv. 219, 245.
21. M. A. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Culture*, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1933, p. 388.
- 21a. According to D. P. Chattopadhyaya the word *Tantra* is derived from the root *tan* with the suffix *stran*. *Tanoti (tanute) tanyate va iti tan+stran*. The meaning of the root *tan* is 'to extend, to spread.' 'Extending . . . the human family, the number of children.' He further states that Tantrism in India is much older than its written texts; and in fact traces of Tantrism are found even in the Indus Civilization. See *Lokayata*, 4th ed., New Delhi, 1978, p. 321; also D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956, p. 54.
- 21b. According to Chattopadhyaya "Even very competent Sanskritists have often misunderstood the word and rendered it as the left-handed *path*. That does not make much sense. It is *Vama* means women or the sexual urge (*Kama*)."*op. cit.*, p. 278.
22. SHTN, p. 82.
23. KGC, pp. 117f.
24. HAG, p. 59.
25. YT, *Patal*, VI, v. 14.
26. EIM, p. 414.
27. B. Bhattacharyya, 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhists', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, p. 218; cf. SHTN, p. 89.
28. HBM, I, p. 339.
29. An inscription dated *Saka* 1154 (A. D. 1232), discovered at Ambari in Gauhati refers to a *hati* or settlement of the *Yogi Gurus* during the region of the Pala king Samudra Pala, see PSN, pp. 9f.
30. HBM, I, p. 350.
31. C. C. Sannyal, *op. cit.*, pp. 139, 141.
32. Risley, *op. cit.*, p. 498; The Hajongs use to worship Bisahari to get themselves recovered from diseases, M. Neog, *op. cit.*, p. 56; SABH, p. 378.
33. M. Neog, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
34. DRV, vv. 516-528.
35. M. Neog, 'Ai, the Small Pox Goddess of Assam', *Man in India*, Vol. XXXI, 1951, pp. 72ff.
36. PAN, p. 256.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
38. C. C. Sannyal, *op. cit.*, p. 142; N. Ray, 'Koch Beharer Loka Samskriti', *Smaranika*, 1st year, February, 1968, p. 12; Risley, *op. cit.*, pp. 498ff.

39. DRV, v. 159.
40. SMCD, vv. 59-59.
41. KGC, p. 159.
42. SMCD, vv. 1345-1347.
43. KGC, p. 262.
44. *Baharistan*, I, p. 273.
45. *Kirtan Aru Nam Ghosha*, (ed.), H. N. Datta Baruah, Nalbari, 1974 (*Kirtan Ghosha* section), v. 340.
46. *Bhagavata*, Book II, v. 545; *Sankara Vakyanrita, Bhagavata* II, v. 1341, (ed.), H. N. Datta Baruah, Nalbari, 1964; (trns.) SHTN, p. 362.
47. *Amulya Ratna* (Ms), KAS, Gauhati; also see KGC, pp. 140, 255.
48. SHTN, p. 369.
49. *Sankara Vakyanrita, Nama-Ghosha* section, vv. 473, 501.
50. SHTN, p. 369.
51. Hem Baruah, *Assamese Literature*, New Delhi, 1965, p. 50.
52. S. K. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
- 52a. S. L. Barua, *op. cit.*.
53. GCR, vv. 3606-3609; KGC, p. 252.
54. *Ibid.*, vv. 3507-3508; BGC, p. 91.
55. *Ibid.*, v. 3755; KGC, pp. 280f.
56. For details on the *Satra* institution, see S. N. Sarma, *The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam*, Gauhati University, 1966.
57. These were—*Brahma-Samhati*, where the Brahmanic elements predominated; *Purusha-Samhati*, called so because they were founded by preachers belonging to Sankaradeva's direct line or *purusha*; *Kala-Samhati*, so named because its founder Gopaldeva had his headquarters at *Kaljar*; *Nika-Samhati*, called so because this group strictly followed the rules and regulations laid down by Madhava-deva.
58. *Bhagavata* XI, v. 13334; In *Kirtana Ghosha*, v. 441, Sankaradeva says that even a Chandala, having sincere devotion to God, is superior to a Brahmin sadly lacking in faith; Barua and Murthy, *Temples and Legends of Assam*, Bombay, p. 122.
59. KGC, p. 32.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
61. H. C. Goswami, *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts*, Calcutta University, 1930, p. 13.
62. KGC, pp. 220f.
63. M. Neog, (ed.), *Sri Guru Carit* by Ramananda Dvijia, Nalbari, 1957, v. 1364.
64. There is a great controversy regarding the original homeland of Dak Mahapurusha. Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and even Nepal claim him to be a native of their respective countries. This is because a large number of aphorisms, ascribed to his name, have been prevalent in these places since ancient times. As for Assam, he is said

to have been born in a village called Lahidangara in modern Barpeta region. His aphorisms are even now widely prevalent in Assam.

65. KGC, p. 32.

66. The process of begging was called *Cat-Phura* or *Caitra-Gowa*, SHTN, p. 96fn.

67. KGC, pp. 33f.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 36; MSB, v. 45.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 237f, 245ff; SMCD, vv. 815-838.

72. D. Neog, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

73. *Vana Parva*, v. 1424; *Vijaya Parva*, vv. 1158, 1133.

74. In his translation of the Book X of the *Bhagavata Purana*, Ananta Kandali writes that he got this title for his mastery over disputations:

Tarkata labhila nam Ananta Kandali,

Bhagavata, Book X, v. 17462.

75. SHTN, p. 97.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 97; SMCD, vv. 817-818; KGC, p. 248.

77. Ms. *Maharaja Vamsavali*.

78. The *Vamsavali* mentions how Naranarayan formally instructed his court scholar to engage themselves in studies, DRV, vv. 604-610.

79. Ram Saraswati has given a detailed list of the facilities which Naranarayan accorded him while asking him to translate the *Mahabharata* into Assamese. To quote his own words:

Amaka karila ojna sadara bacane

Bharata payara tumi kariyo yatane.

Amara grihata ache Tika-Bhashya yata,

Niyoka apona grihe dioho samasta.

Ehibuli Raja Sava baladhi jorai,

Pathaila pustaka save amasara thai.

Dhana-vastra-alankara dila bahutara,

Dasa-dasi diya mana barhaila amara.

Pushpa Harana, *Vana Parva*, vv. 3936-3937.

I was asked (by him) to render the *Mahabharata* into Assamese verse. (He says): "Take all the *Tikas* and *Bhashyas* (commentaries) which are in my library." So saying the king sent all the books to my residence on the back of bulls. He also encouraged me by providing with the service of slaves and servants and by paying a large sum of money.)

80. H. C. Goswami, *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 38, 76ff. The translated book of *Gita Govinda* was named as *Jayadeva Kavya*.

81. According to some, he was the author of as many as twenty eight *Kaumudis*, D. Sarmah, *Mangalidoir Buranji*, Gauhati, 1974, p. 87.

82. N. K. Basu, *Assam in the Ahom Age*, Calcutta, 1970, p. 275.

83. A. Chakravarti, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

84. D. Sarmah, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
87. SMCD, vv. 1508-1509.
88. AEAIK, p. 155.
89. H. Barua, *Assamese Literature*, New Delhi, 1965, p. 115.
90. YT, II, *Patal*, VII, vv. 14-16.
91. Preparation of *sanci-pat* was a laborious process which included currying, seasoning and polishing the raw slices of the bark before it could be made fit for writing, see HAG, Appendix 'D', p. 428; S. K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the Literature of Assam*, Gauhati, 1962, p. 74.
92. SHTN, pp. 30ff; Lila Gogoi, *Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti*, Sibsagar, 1961, pp. 126ff.
93. For preparation of ink, see, Kaliram Medhi, 'Likhar Sajuli', *Kaliran Medhi Rachanawali*, Jorhat, 1979, pp. 287f.
94. An interesting incident about the use of sap of earth-worms by king Naranarayan, is narrated in an Assamese chronicle. It is said that once the Koch king sent a letter to the Ahom king Sukhampha Khora Raja written in invisible ink which baffled the Ahom court till an abstruse official deciphered it by reading the letter in darkness when the letters appeared in their unexpected brightness, S. K. Bhuyan, *Studies in Assamese Literature*, p. 77.
95. YT, II, *Patal*, VII.
96. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* mentions that he was expected to know the causes and remedies of diseases like *bat* (gout), *pitta* (gastric), *kapha* (phlegm) and *slesma* (mucus), all of which might occur due to malnutrition, DRV, v. 186.
97. GCS, pp. 282f.
98. D. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
99. KP, Chapter 71.
- 99a. N. K. Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 291.
100. SHTN, pp. 280ff.
101. P. C. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 326.
102. See for details, H. K. Sarmah, 'Deodhani Nritya', *Asam Sahitya Sabha Patrika*, 20th year, 1961, pp. 13ff.
103. *Rukmini Harana*, v. 532.
104. P. D. Choudhury, 'The Sculpture of Assam', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, p. 19.
105. The art critics assign the sculpture of the Kamakhya temple to the fourth school. As Gopinath Rao observes:
 "Viewing broadly, it may well be said that there were four different schools representing four different regions of India. The fourth school, which resembles closely the third in respect of ornamentation and grouping, is chiefly represented by the sculpture of Bengal, Assam and Orissa. It is at once recognised by the human figures therein possessing round faces, in which are set two oblique eyes, a broad forehead, a pair of thin lips and a small chin." cf. Barua and Murthy, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

106. There is much controversy regarding the principal image of the temple. While one group holds it to be the image of Lord Buddha, some others regard it to be that of Lord Vishnu in his form as Hayagriva-Madhava. But in fact, it was the image of Lord Buddha. To quote E. T. Dalton, "The Brahmanas call the object of worship Madhob, the Buddhists call it Mahamuni, the great sage. It is in fact simply a colossal image of Budh in stone, and perhaps, of all the idols now occupying the holiest places in the temples, the only aboriginal," E. T. Dalton, 'Notes on Assam Temple Ruins', *JASB*, 1855, XXIV, No. 1, p. 19. The pedestal of the image still contain a famous Buddhist *mantra*, 'Om mani padme ho'.
107. The *Vamsavali* refers to another artisan called Sumaru Barkath, DRV, v. 679.
108. E. T. Dalton, 'Notes on Assam Temple Ruins', *JASB*, 1855, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, p. 19.
109. *JARS*, Vol. II, p. 42; cf. SHTN, p. 86.
110. Dalton, *loc. cit.*, p. 20.
111. PSN, p. 6.
112. Blochman, *loc. cit.*, pp. 66f.
113. Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
114. Even about the extant buildings constructed in about 1828 during the days of Harendranarayan (1801-1839), Captain Lewin writes that "the town consists of a congeries of mud huts, surrounding the brick mansion (*i.e.*, the palace) which is by courtesy called the palace of the Koch Behar *Rajas*," SABH, p. 360.
115. DRV, v. 544.
116. S. K. Chatterji, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
117. *Annual Report on the Archaeological Survey of India*, 1927-28, pp. 112ff.
118. S. K. Chatterji, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
119. The Barpeta *Satra Kirtanghar*, built according to the instruction of Mathuradas Budha Ata, the chief apostle of Madhavadeva, during the reign of Raghudev, measured 60 by 30 yards, which was the largest *Kirtanghar* of all the *Satras* throught the kingdom, PAN, p. 257.
120. KGC, pp. 446ff; SMCD, vv. 1286-1289.
121. SHTN, p. 317.
122. N. K. Basu, *op. cit.*, pp. 326f.
123. cf. SHTN, p. 307fn.
124. SHTN, p. 305.
125. *Ibid.*
126. *Ibid.*, pp. 306f.

Epilogue

The Koches, also known as Kambojas in earlier epigraphic records and as *Kuvacas* or *Kuvacakas* in later medieval literary works, were a Mongoloid tribe. They inhabited Tibet and its adjoining regions before their coming down into the plains of Assam and north Bengal. By about 10th century A.D. or even earlier, the tribe still known as *Kambojas* became powerful enough to establish its hegemony in Bengal taking advantage of the declining strength of the Palas. For about half a century, the Kambojas ruled in Bengal, but their power soon declined and the Palas recovered their lost position.

In the beginning of the 16th century A.D. Bisu, the chief of eastern branch of the tribe, established himself over the Khuntaghat region in the western Brahmaputra valley. Gradually Bisu had extended his sway from the Karatoya in the west to the Barnadi in the east and declared himself king in about A.D. 1515. His kingdom was called Koch Behar meaning 'the residing place of the Koches'. He had his capital at Kantanagar or Kamatapur, which too later came to be known as Koch Behar.

The astute Brahmins who so long designated the Koches as *Mlecchas*, now came forward to accept them to the Hindu fold. They christened Bisu as Biswa Singha and ascribed him a Kshatriya origin. Biswa Singha well consolidated his conquest and laid the foundation of a strong kingdom which soon attracted the attention of the great Mughals. The secret of Biswa Singha's success was not merely the existing political confusion in the region but also his ability to organise the entire strength of his own tribe as well as of those inhabiting the region. The Bhuyans who had been playing an important

role in the political life of the period, failed to offer a united resistance against this tribal chief and had at last accepted his overlordship. They were, however, allowed to enjoy their autonomy.

The rise of the Koches had a great significance in the political history of medieval north eastern India. The Ahoms, a Tibeto-Burman tribe who had established themselves in the extreme south eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley in the early part of the 13th century, had in the meantime made themselves the master of the whole eastern Brahmaputra valley and were covetously looking towards the west—their only way of expansion. On the western border of the Koch kingdom the Afghans were ruling, who had even conquered the erstwhile kingdom of Kamata in A.D. 1498 under Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah and introduced their rule there, although for a short period. This success of Ala-ud-din inspired his successors to repeat their attacks in the Brahmaputra valley. The founder Koch king was therefore, to proceed with great tact and caution. "A born leader of men" Biswa Singha had "combined in himself great military talents with unrivalled genius for administrative organisation".¹ His reign lasting for a period of about a quarter of a century was marked by splendid success so that at his death he could leave a kingdom strong enough not only to stem the tide of foreign aggression but also to undertake aggressive military conquests.

During the reign of Biswa Singha's illustrious son and successor Naranarayan (1540-1587) who may be considered as the greatest king of medieval north-east India, the Koches rose to the climax of their political glory and cultural achievements. Naranarayan was fortunate enough to possess in his brother Chilarai a most efficient general, along with whom, he pursued a career of aggressive conquests and brought all the states of north-eastern India under Koch hegemony. Indeed it was Naranarayan, who after Bhaskaravarman of ancient Kamarupa, made an attempt to establish an empire in north-eastern India. The rising power of the Koches attracted the attention of the Sultan of Bengal who led an expedition to the Koch kingdom in A.D. 1568, which ended with the defeat and imprisonment of the Koch general. Although after sometime the latter managed his release, waning brilliance of the Koch

political glory could not be restored. In fact, they had long reached the saturating point of their military aggrandisement.

The news of Chilarai's defeat had already encouraged the subjugated states to shake off the Koch vassalage and assert independence. Things took such a turn with the conquest of Bengal by the Mughals under the great emperor Akbar that Naranarayan thought it wise to court the friendship of the former as well as of the Ahoms. The Mughal emperor too was in need of an ally to subdue the rebellious Afghans in Bengal. He, therefore, warmly responded to the Koch king's offer of friendship. But the Mughals could not remain content with the conquest of Bengal. They were looking for a trade route to south-east Asia through Bengal, Koch Behar and Assam, for realisation of which the conquest of the other two kingdoms was most essential. However, so long Naranarayan lived, there was no attempt made in that direction by the Mughals. Contemporary Persian sources, on the other hand, inform us that Naranarayan had allied with the Mughals in fighting the Afghans in Bengal.

The death of Naranarayan was followed by the disintegration of the Koch kingdom. Already in 1581 the kingdom had been partitioned between Naranarayan and Raghudev, son of Chilarai; the western part consisting of Koch Behar proper being retained by the former and the eastern part, called Kamrup or Koch Hajo being given over to the latter. It was, of course, not the partition as such, but jealousy and conflict between the two brother kingdoms, which as narrated, led to the loss of independence of the western division and annexation of the eastern one first to the Mughal empire (1612) and later to the Ahom kingdom (1669). Their conquest of Kamrup brought the Mughals into the direct clash with the Ahoms. The desire of the Mughals to conquer Assam and the strong determination of the Assamese to resist their advance to their kingdom with success to the latter in the long run forms a very interesting chapter of medieval Indian history, but outside the scope of our work.

The hundred years of Koch rule under study which saw the rise, climax and disintegration of the Koch power, was marked by important changes in the political, socio-economic and cultural life of this part of the country. In the political field,

the first two Koch rulers succeeded in bringing about a political integration at least in those areas which were under their direct administration. It had its impact in the autonomous territories also. The large militia with which Naranarayan and Chilarai carried on their extensive conquests were drawn not only from the areas under their direct administration but also from those under the autonomous rule of the Bhuyans, the tribal chiefs or the feudatory rulers. These soldiers in course of their fairly long period of military expeditions, obviously came into contact with the people of other parts of the region. This mobility and mutual contact, although for purely military purposes, had undoubtedly influenced the social relations of the heterogeneous tribes and communities of the region and thereby helped the process of political and cultural integrity. Besides, there had always been a threat of invasion from the western neighbour—the rulers of Bengal—which had intensified the need of political integration.

The Koch kings encouraged arts and crafts, agriculture and industries, constructed roads, rest houses, channels and bridges, built a number of *Satras*, minted coins and did such other welfare works. Ram Saraswati in his *Mahabharata* states that excluding the religious men, beggars, monks, and children etc. nine lacs of people daily engaged themselves in different works in the capital at Koch Behar.² This had a direct effect in the growth of trade and handicrafts which consequently led to the prosperity of the kingdom. Its growing trade and commerce attracted even European merchants like Ralf Fitch to its capital. Besides, the Koch rulers had built up an elaborate administrative machinery and also a ruling class consisting of the members of both the upper caste Hindus and the Hinduised tribes. The aristocracy, however, kept itself distinguished from the commoners.

In the social life, the period saw significant changes brought about mainly by the Neo-Vaishnavite movement which received direct patronage of the Koch rulers. Sankaradeva himself in the *Bhagavata Purana* states that the new creed built a society where "the Kiratas, the Kacharies, the Khasis, the Garos, the Miris, the Yavanas, the Kankas, the Goalas, and others"³ had become the members of one Vaishnava fraternity. In fact it was this movement which, as stated earlier, had

unified the diverse tribes and communities under a common Vaishnava fold and gave them a common *lingua-franca* in the form of Assamese, a common cultural pattern and thereby a common cultural identity. This socio-cultural integration was a supplement to the political integration and strengthened the bonds of unity among the people. The advocacy of the path of devotion as the way of salvation for all castes including the *Chandalas* or untouchables and the ideal of "universal social brotherhood" of the new religion greatly helped the creation of a harmonious atmosphere and bridged the distinction between the Brahmins and *Sudras*. Human and animal sacrifice or the esoteric rites associated with the worship of gods and goddesses suffered a setback but could not be rooted out. Although priesthood which was so long a monopoly of the Brahmins, now came to be practised by the *Sudras* as well, the Brahmins continued to claim a privileged position for themselves including their traditional right to preach and educate. On balance the position of woman deteriorated. She lost most of her rights and freedom enjoyed in a tribal society and came to be looked upon with disgrace if not with contempt.

Despite this, the Koch rule under study witnessed remarkable developments almost in every field of culture. There was an outburst of creative activity particularly in the fields of literature, music and dance which made the Koch rule highly significant in the history of north-eastern India. All the Koch rulers, beginning from Biswa Singha down to his descendants in Koch Behar, Kamrup and Darrang were patrons of arts and letters. Both Naranarayan and Chilarai had great respect for Vedic culture and Sanskrit learning. Naranarayan was particularly interested in the *Smriti Sastras* and appointed Sanskrit scholars like Purushottam Vidyavagish to compile or compose works on *Smriti*. There were also many other works, both religious and secular, written in that language under his direct patronage. Meanwhile was launched the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. Sankaradeva, like other Indian *Bhakti* preachers, propagated his teachings in the vernacular and composed his works mainly on that language. This led to the growth of a new branch of Assamese literature called Vaishnava literature. Naranarayan, who had sheltered Sankaradeva, worked hand in hand with the Vaishnava saint in getting not

only the Sanskrit religious texts translated into Assamese but other works as well. His noble objective is clear from his own words uttered before the scholars whom he had summoned for this purpose: "These translations will first be read by women and *Sudras* and after sometime by the Brahmins as well. It is only by this means that the scriptures can be protected from loss in this *Kali Yuga*."⁴ How he had assisted the scholars with all the necessities including money and the services of servants and slaves, has been described in an earlier chapter of this work. The translation of the original Sanskrit texts made their contents open to all people high or low. To quote Madhava-deva, "The river of the nectar of love which had shone forth formerly in the Vaikuntha had flooded the entire world, Sankaradeva having broken open the banks."⁵ Ananta Kandali, a contemporary of Sankaradeva, who had also adopted vernacular in preference to Sanskrit, said that the purpose of doing so was to make the women, *Sudras* and others learn the significance and rejoice by listening to the books.⁶

In the field of fine arts, the period witnessed remarkable developments. In fact, the growth and development of the Assamese drama dates back to this period. The performance of the *Rama-Vijaya* drama in the Koch capital under active patronage of Chilarai in the theatre hall he built for the purpose, is a significant development in the history of Assamese drama. The establishment of the *Satra* institution under Koch royal patronage gave a new impetus to all branches of fine arts and brought about a complete regeneration in the field. That master artist Sankaradeva so skilfully mingled Indian musical and dance traditions with the indigenous ones that an independent school which can rightly be called Kamrupi or Assamese school of music and dance, grew up. Indeed the Vaishnava *Bargits* and other prayer songs which are still very popular, formed a distinct branch of classical Indian music. A talented musician himself, Chilarai not only encouraged new compositions but himself wrote the commentary to the Assamese version of the *Gita Govinda* by Jayadeva. In a like way the *Sastriya* dance, greatly esteemed by artists all over the world in present days, has also owed its origin to Sankaradeva and the patronage of the Koch kings. There is even ground to believe that the world famous Manipuri dance which is reco-

gnised as one of the four schools of Indian classical dance, was but a 'by-product' of Assam's *Satriya* school of Dance.⁷

In the field of painting, the age of the Koches inaugurated a new era. Besides manuscript painting, the artists of the period used to paint walls and pillars of the *Namghars* and *Manikuts* of the *Satras*. The legacy thus started inspired the production of the vast mass of painting works in latter periods, most noted of them being the *Hasti-Vidyarnava* the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* and the *Dharma Purana*. Painters were recruited from among the local people and provisions for training them in the vocation, was made specially in the *Satras*. In the field of painting also local materials were used and besides religious matters, social life formed another subject of painting. This was probably the reason why art of painting became much popular in the period under study. As pointed out by R. Das Gupta, "the art was never forgotten even when the *Ekasarana Nama Dharma* lost its sway at the Koch Court," and some families in the villages near Koch Behar still have in their possession numerous painted manuscripts most of which are a couple of centuries old.⁸

In the field of architecture and sculpture, the period however does not deserve much praise. Even though a number of architectural works still remain, these were mainly done on the ancient remains. The reason for this has been discussed in the preceding chapter. It may also be added that there was fear of destruction of temples by iconoclastic hands and therefore the rulers did not like to spend on costly architectural works and the artisans diverted their talents and times to other branches of fine arts. Even then a new style of architecture grew up in the *Satra* buildings and the artisans of our period produced finely decorated buildings, having a style of its own, with wood, bamboo, cane and ivory.

The period under study was one of transition, when a large number of tribes through Neo-Vaishnavism had been entering the fold of Hinduism and hence became acquainted with advance culture. There was also wide extension of the plough which led to the increase of agricultural production and promotion of agricultural pursuits. But the society being feudal, exploitation of the peasants and artisans by the ruling class was but natural. Surplus production meant an increase in the

rate of payment to the master, for fear of which the peasant usually cultivated only what was required to maintain his living.

It may also be noted that the *Satra* institutions in course of time, had built up a class of rich land-lords in the form of the *Satradhikaras*, who by virtue of their being spiritual heads, claimed also temporal power for themselves. This relation between the *Satra* and the state with significant results affecting the life of the people in a subsequent period of Assam history, still awaits an objective study. During the period under study, of course, neither Sankaradeva nor Naranarayan and Chilarai could anticipate that the *Satra* would one day become a state within a state and hence the most potential threat to the existence of monarchy. On the other hand, as already stated, the Koch kings took personal interest in the organisation of the *Satras*, and the harmonious relation between the Koch kings and the Vaishnava reformers lead to the production of a cultural legacy which still pervades in the vitals of the Assamese society.

REFERENCES

1. MNEFPB, p. 74.
2. *Adi Vana Parva*, v. 3924.
3. *Bhagavata, Book II*, v. 474
4. DRV, vv. 604-606.
5. *Nama-Ghosha*, v. 371, also vv. 100-102.
6. *Bhagavata*, X, v. 16201.
7. Rabha, *op. cit.*, p. 15; M. Neog, *Sankaradeva*, New Delhi, Reprint, 1980, p. 55.
8. R. Das Gupta, *Eastern Indian Manuscript Painting*, Bombay, 1972, pp. 18, 81,

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Geneological Table of the Koch Kings

	A.D.	A.D.
Biswa Singha	c 1515	1540
Nara Singha	1540	1540
Naranarayan	1540	1587
Lakshminarayan (Koch Behar)	1587	1627
Raghudevsnarayan (Koch Hajo)	1581	1603
Parikshitnarayan	1603	1612

APPENDIX B

Geneological Table of the Bengal Rulers and Viceroys

	A.D.	A.D.
<i>Hussain Shahi Dynasty</i>		
Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah	1493	1519
Nasiruddin Abul Muzaffar Nushrat Shah	1519	1532
Alauddin Firoz	1532	1533
Ghiyasuddin Mahmud Shah	1533	1538
<i>Sur Dynasty</i>		
Sher Shah	1539	1545
Islam Shah	1545	1553
Shamsuddin Muhammad Shah Ghazi	1553	1555
(Shahbaz Khan	1555	1556)
Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah	1555	1560
Jalal Shah alias Ghiyasuddin II	1560	1563
Ghiyasuddin III	1563	1564

Karrani Dynasty

Taj Khan Karrani	1564	1565
Sulaiman Karrani	1565	1572
Daud Khan Karrani	1572	1574

The Mughal Viceroys in Bengal

Munim Khan (Khan-i-Khanan)	1574	1575
Hussain Quli Beg (Khan-i-Jahan)	1575	1578
Muzaffar Khan Turbati	1578	1580
(Usurption by the mutinous officers)	1580	1582
Khain-i-Azam (Mirza 'Aziz Kokah)	1582	1583
Shabaz Khan	1583	1585
Sadiq Khan	1585	1586
Wazir Khan	1586	1587
Said Khan	1587	1594
Man Singh Kachhwa	1594	1606
Qutbuddin Khan Kokah (Shaikh Khub an)	1606	1607
Jahangir Quli Beg	1607	1608
Islam Khan (Saikh' Ala-ud-din Chisti)	1608	1613
Qasim Khan Chisti (Muhtasham Khan)	1613	1617

APPENDIX C

**Sanskrit Text and English Translation of the
Dinajpur Stone Pillar Inscription**

Sanskrit Text:

ॐ
 দুর্জয়ারি-বর্জহানী-প্রমথনে দানেচ বিদ্যায়ৈঃ
 তান্নিন্দং দিদি
 যস্য মার্গন-গুণ-প্রায়গ্রহা গীষতো।
 কাঙ্ক্ষোজব্রহ্মজেন গোড়পতি-
 না তেনেন্দু সৌলোবয়ং
 প্রাসাদো নিব্বমায়ি কুঞ্জব স্টা-বর্জ-ভূ-ভুষণঃ ॥

[The king Kunjaraghatavarsa of the Kamboja family, whose ability to crush irresistible enemy forces and whose generosity in gift making is being sung by the Vidyadharas of heaven, had built this lofty temple of (god) Indramauli (Siva)].

APPENDIX D

**Sanskrit Text and English Translation of the
Kamakhya Temple Rock Inscription**

Sanskrit Text:

ওঁ লোকানুগ্রহ-কাৰকঃ কৰণয়া পাত্ৰো ধনুৰ্বিদ্যায়া
দানেনাপি দধীচি-কৰ্ণো-সদৃশো মৰ্যাদয়াহোনিধিঃ।
নানা-শাস্ত্র-বিচাৰ-চাক্ষ-চৰিতঃ কন্দৰ্প-কাপোজ্জ্বলঃ
কামাখ্যা-চৰণাৰ্ছকো বিজয়তে শ্রীমল্লদেবো বৃণঃ ॥
প্রসাদমদি-দুহিতু শ্চবগাববিন্দ-
ভক্ত্যকবোতদনুজো বব-নীল-শৈলে।
শ্রীশুকুদেব ইমমুল্লসিতোপনেন
শাকে তুবঙ্গ-গজ-বেদ-শশাঙ্ক-সংখ্যে ॥

তস্যৈব প্রিয়-সোদৰঃ পুথুমশা বীৰেন্দ্র-গোনি-মূলী-
মানিক্যং ভঙ্গমান-কল্প-বিত্তী নীলাচলে মঞ্জুলম্।
প্রাসাদং মূনি-নাগ-বেদ-শশঙ্কশাকে শিলা-ৰাজিভি-
দেবী-ভক্তিযতাং বৰো ৰচিতবান্ শ্রীশুকু-পূৰ্ব-ধবজঃ ॥

["Glory to the king Malla Deb, who by virtue of his mercy, is kind to the people, who in archery is like Arjun, and in charity like Dadhichi and Karna; he is like an ocean of all goodness, and he is versed in many *sastras*; his character is excellent; in beauty he is as bright as Kandarpa, he is a worshipper of Kamakhya. His younger brother Sukladeb built this temple of bright stones on the Nila hillock, for the worship of the goddess Durga, in 1487 Sak (A.D. 1565). His beloved brother Sukladhavaj again, with universal fame, the crown of the greatest heroes, who, like the fabulous Kalpataru, gave all that was devoutly asked of him, the chief of all devotees of the goddess, constructed this beautiful temple with heaps of stones on the Nila hill in 1487 Sak."]

Translation from HAG, p. 58.

APPENDIX E

**Sanskrit Text and English Translation of the
Hayagriha-Madhava Temple Rock Inscription**

Sanskrit Text:

ত্রীশ্রীমদ-বিশ্বমিত্রঃ শ্রুতিপতিবত্ত্বং-বুতঃ-শ্রুত-কীর্তিঃ
 ত্রীমদ-শ্রীমদেবো নৃপতিবত্ত্বমতি-নির্জিত-বীতি-চোতিঃ ।
 নাক্ষত্রীশ্রীদার্য-শৌর্য-প্রথিত-পুণ্ড-শ্রী-কর্ম-বদন্তঃ
 ত্রীমদ-বুদ্ধমিত্রো-ব্যতনিত-তদনুজো-বদ-বংশ-শেষদেশঃ ॥
 সাক্ষ্যমোদন-পুণ্ড-দিশি-দিশি-প্রথিত-কীর্তি-ব্রজো
 হস্তাপুণ্ডজন্য-যো-বিশি-বশাদ-যঃ-কামক-পেশবঃ ।
 যো-যো-হাখিল-লোক-শোক-দহন-জ্যোত্বালী-বাৰিদঃ
 ত্রীমদ-বুদ্ধমিত্রো-ভূপতিবত্ত্বং-শুক্ল-বংশ-বংশঃ ॥
 তস্য-শেষ-প্রসাদ-ভূমকঃ-শ্রীকৃষ্ণ-পাদাম্বকো
 তুণঃ-প্রাপ্ত-বদ-বদ-প্রসাদ-বদ-বদ-বদ ॥
 মণা-খান-শিৰো-হস্ত-বিশি-বদ-বদ-বদ-বদ-বদ
 শাক-বদ-বিত্তি-গুণিবঃ-কাবঃ-স্বয়ং-বদ-বদ ॥

১৫০৫ শক ॥

["There was a ruler of the earth named Bisva Singh; his illustrious son, the most wise king Malla Deb, was the conqueror of all enemies. In gravity and liberality and for heroism he had a great reputation, and he was purified by religious deeds. After him was born his brother Sukladhvaj, who subdued many countries. The son of this Sukladhvaj was king Raghu Deb, who was like the greatest man of the Raghu race: his glories spread out in all directions; the lord of Kamarupa, in obedience to the order of destiny, is the slayer of the wicked, who was like water to the flames of the fire of sorrow of the vast populace. Of the seed of Sukladhvaj, a king was born of the name of Raghu Deb, who consoles innumerable persons and is a worshipper of the feet of Krishna; the king coming of age had a temple built on the hillock called Mani hillock in 1505 Sak (A.D. 1583). The most skilled and efficient artisan Sridhar himself built it."]

Translation from HAG, p. 64.

**Sanskrit Text and English Translation of the
Pandunath Temple Rock Inscription**

Sanskrit Text:

শ্রীমল্ল-নৃপানুভবস্য কৃতিনঃ শুক্লধ্বজস্ত্যগ্নাদে
বীরে শিবসুদেব-ভূপতি-কুনোভ্যংসে কালানাং নিধৌ ।
দুর্গাদত্তব্রহ্মণ শাসতি গুণব্রাহ্মণিবাগ্নে ব্রহ্মীং
তস্যামাত্য-গদাধরস্য বহুশঃ স্নেহানুকূল্যাদপি
শ্রীপাণ্ডুনামস্যা হবৈঃ শিল্পাভিঃ প্রাসাদমনির্ভিষান্নান্নোক্তং
পয়োনিধিবিষ্ণুপদকভানঃ পাকে স্তব হোম-শবেন্দু-সংখ্যে ॥
১৫০৭ শক ॥

[Of Sukladhvaj, the illustrious brother of king Malladev, was born Raghudev who held the crown for a long time. He ruled the earth with (full) glory by the grace of goddess Durga. His minister Gadadhara, because of his great love to him (the king) has built the beautiful temple of Pandunath Hari with stones and dedicated to the feet of Payonidhi Vishnu in Saka 1507.]

APPENDIX G

**Sanskrit Text and English Translation of the
Kamateswari Temple Rock Inscription**

Sanskrit Text

ॐ नमः श्रीगणेशाय ॥

७१ सम्मत्ता द्विषदेकजिह्वबहुधादङ्ग-प्रतापार्थ-
 क्रीडा-कन्द-वेश-वर्द्धि-दिशः श्रीप्राण-छमिपतेः ।
 साकान्दे नन-नाग-मार्ग-हिमलोतिस्त्रिते निर्मितः
 श्रीगणेशे करिमुनेन उक्तता उर्यो उरानीमः ॥१५८७॥

[Salute to Ganesha. The king Pran (narayan) who had extended the (culture of) games and sports and (construction of) buildings in all directions, being guided by noble motive, could defeat enemies by strength of his own arms. He built this temple of Bhavani in Saka 1587 who is worshipped by poets and rich men.]

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(A) Inscriptions

(i) Rock inscriptions

Ambari Inscription, Found at Ambari near Gauhati and preserved at the Assam State Museum, Gauhati the Ambari Stone Inscription of *Saka* 1154 (A.D. 1232) records two important terms—*Satra* and *Hati*, which throw new light on the origin of the *Satra* institution in Assam.

(ii) Temple and land grant inscriptions

Dinajpur (Bangarh) Stone Pillar Inscription., A stone pillar, 8'4" in height, found at Bangarh in Dinajpur in modern Bengal, bears a short inscription in Sanskrit, recording the erection of a Siva temple by a king of the Kamboja family—Kunjaraghatavarsa. It helps in tracing the early history of the Koches. (Illustration Plate I), Appendix C.

Hayagriva-Madhava Temple Stone Inscription. The inscription of the Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo records the rebuilding of the temple by Raghudeva in *Saka* 1505 (A.D. 1583). (Sanskrit text of the inscription along with its English version is given in Appendix E).

Irda Copperplate Inscription. Discovered in Balasore district of Orissa, this inscription records the grant of land in the *Dandabhuktimandala* in Vardhamana *Bhukti* by *Paramesvar Paramabhattacharaka Maharajadhiraja* Nayapaladeva, son of the *Kamboja-vamsa-tilaka-Maharajadhiraja* Sri Rajyapala. This inscription helps us in reconstructing the early history of the Kambojas or the Koches.

Kamakhya Temple Inscription. The inscription records the rebuilding of the Kamakhya temple by Sukladvaj alias Chilarai during the reign of Naranarayan in *Saka* 1487 (A.D. 1965). (Sanskrit text of the inscription along with its English version is given in Appendix D).

Kamateswari Temple Rock Inscription. The inscription records the building of the Bhavani (Kamateswari) temple by Pranarayan in *Saka* 1587 (A.D. 1665). Sanskrit text and English version are given in Appendix G).

Pandunath Temple Rock Inscription. The inscription records the rebuilding of the Pandunath temple in *Saka* 1507 (A.D. 1585). Sanskrit text of the inscription (along with its English version is given in Appendix F).

Rautkuchi Copper-plate Inscription of Purushottamadasa. The inscription records the grant of a village, Rautkuchi, near modern Nalbari in Kamrup district to a Brahmin, Dharmakanta, by a Bhuyan named Purushottamadasa in *Saka* 1251 (A.D. 1329). It throws light on the political history of the Kamarupa kingdom under the Kamata kings who ruled before the Koches.

(iii) In scriptions on guns and cannons

(a) Of Lakshminarayan

One field piece of Lakshminarayan has been preserved with the Koch Behar royal family bearing the following legend *Sri Krishna pada nakha-chandra-prakasamono-vilasha-sri-sri-Lakshminarayana-bhupa-nripamidam sa* (ka) 1533.

(This is of king Sri Sri Lakshminarayan who has the qualities manifested in the crescent shaped spot at the feet of Sri Krishna and who is dear to him. *Saka* 1533.

(b) Of Parikshitnarayan

One field piece of Parikshitnarayan has been preserved in the Assam State Museum, Gauhati. It contains the following legend.

Sri Sri Parikshitnarayana-karitamidam-2-Sake 1532.

(This is made by Sri Sri Parikshitnarayana in *Saka* 1532 (A.D. 1610).

(c) *Of Raghudev*

An inscribed field piece of Raghudev has been preserved in the National Museum, Calcutta, with the following legend.

Sri Sri-Raghudevanarayana-kar itamidam Saka 1519

(This is made by Sri Sri Raghudevanarayana in *Saka* 1519 (A.D. 1597).

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(B) Coins*Jayantiya Coins*

A number of Jayantiya coins have been discovered which are very useful to reconstruct the history of the Koches. The legends of these coins are as follows

Obverse: *Sri Sri ja
yanti pura pu
randarasya sa
ke 1692.*

Reverse: *Sri Sri Si
vacarana ka
mala madhu ka
rasya.*

Koch Coins:

A large number of Koch coins have been discovered in different places of Assam and Bengal. The legends of the Koch coins have been given in chapter VI of the work.

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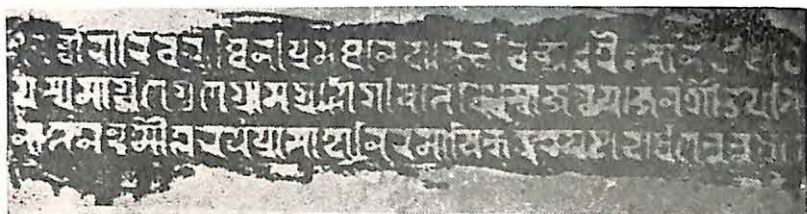
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ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATE I

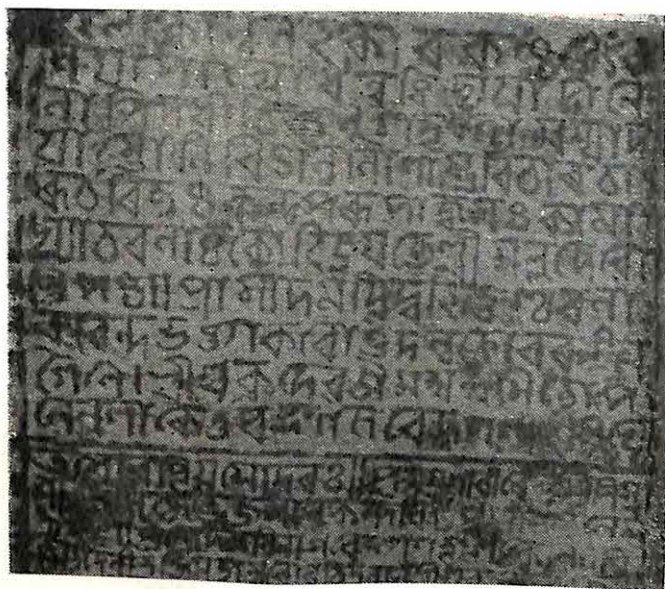
Dinajpur Stone Pillar Inscription



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PLATE II

Kamakhya Temple Stone Inscription



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PLATE III

Kamateswari Temple Rock Inscription



(From PSN, by courtesy of the Publication Board, Assam)

PLATE IV

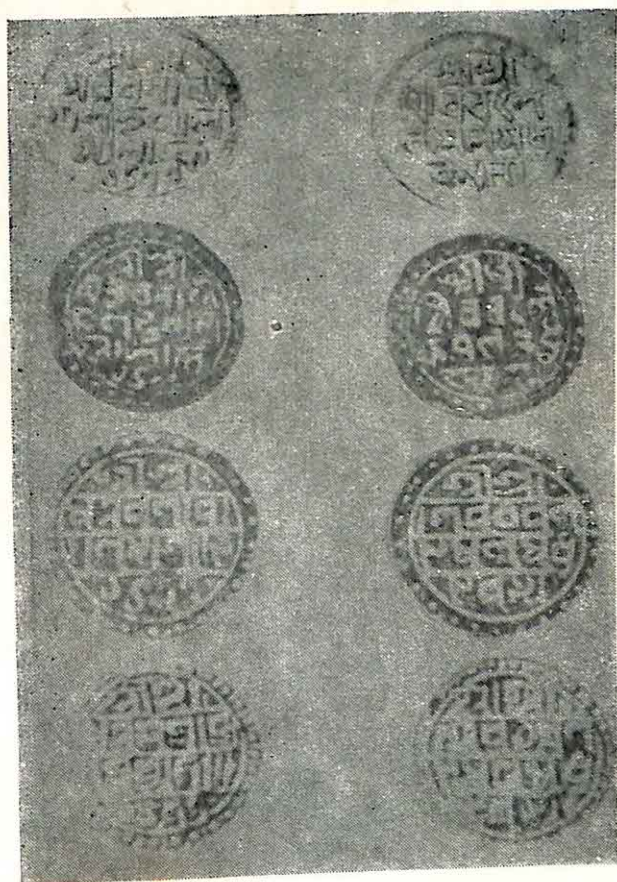
Inscription on the Cannon of Parikshitnarayan



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PLATE V
One Rupee Coins of Naranarayan
Obverse Reverse

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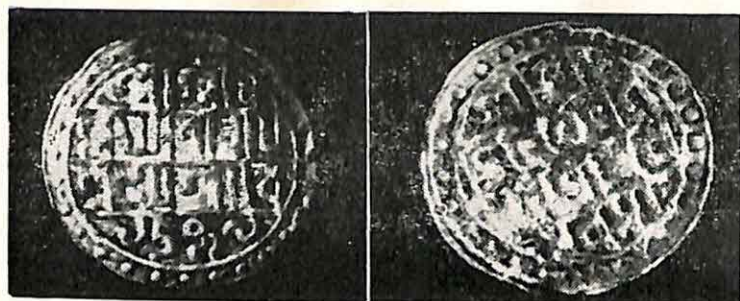
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PLATE VI
A One Rupee
Coin of Lakhminarayan

Obverse

Reverse

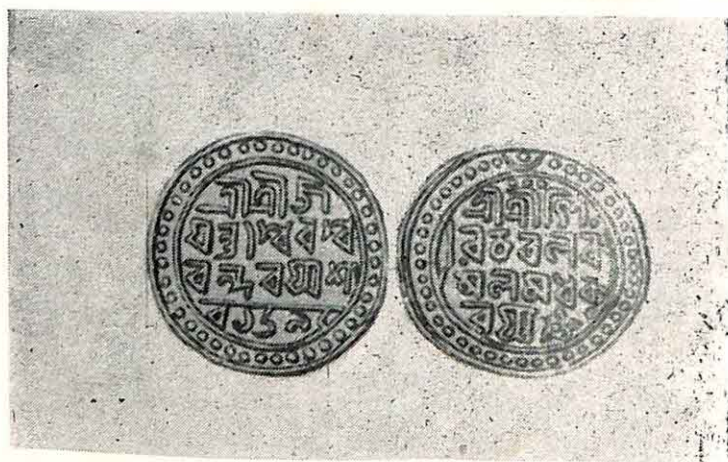


Sri Sri Ma
Lakshminaraya
nasya sake
1509

Sri Sri
Siva carana
Kamala madhu
Karasya.

(By courtesy of the DHAS,
Assam, Gauhati)

PLATE VII
A Jayantiya Coin
Obverse Reverse



Sri Sri ja
Yanti Pura Pu
randarasya Sa
Ke 1592

Sri Sri Si
va carana ka
mala madhu ka
rasya.

(From JASB, Vol. LXIV, Pt. 1, 1895; by courtesy of the
National Library, Calcutta)

PLATE VIII
The Kamakhya Temple

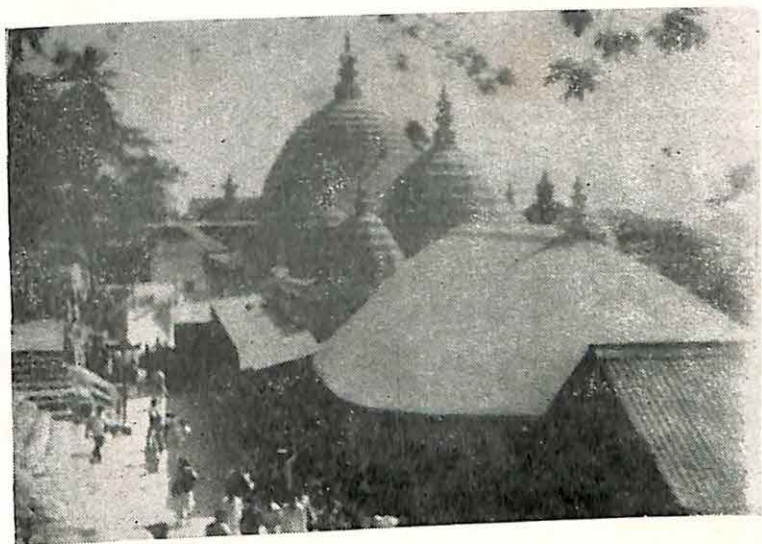


PLATE IX
The Hayagriva-Madhava Temple

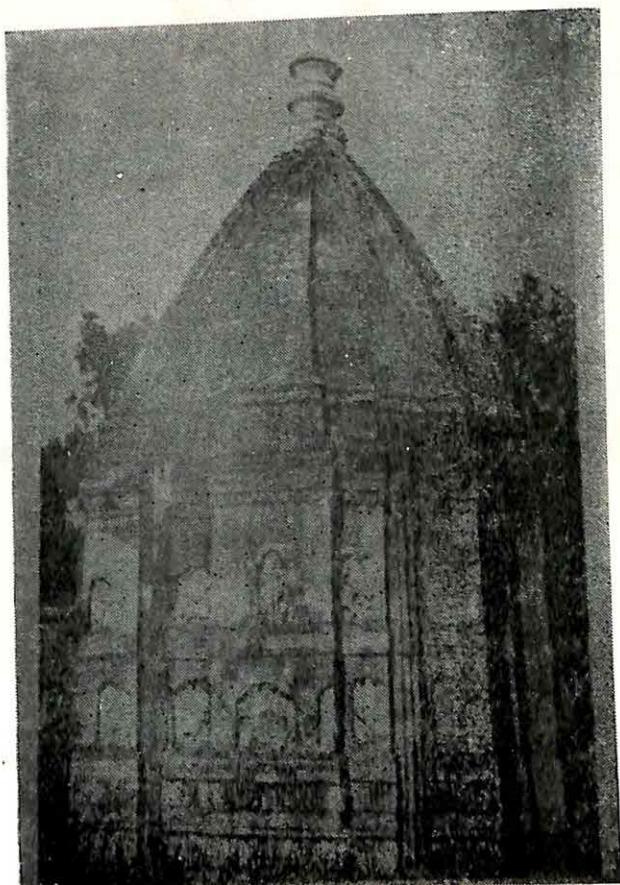


PLATE X

A MS Page from Ram Saraswati's
MAHABHARATA

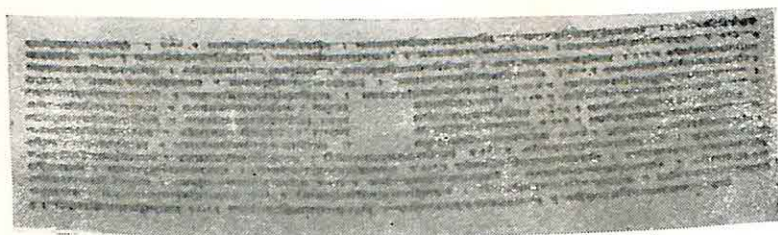


PLATE XI

An illustrated page from a 16th century MS showing the
king's (Naranarayan) listening to recitation



PLATE XII

An illustrated page from the CHITRA BHAGAVATA



PLATE XIII

An Illustrated Book Cover

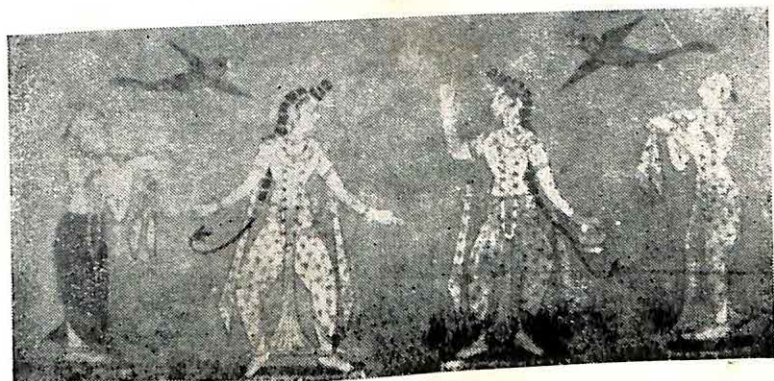


PLATE XIV
SIMHASANA
Barpeta Satra Kirtanghar

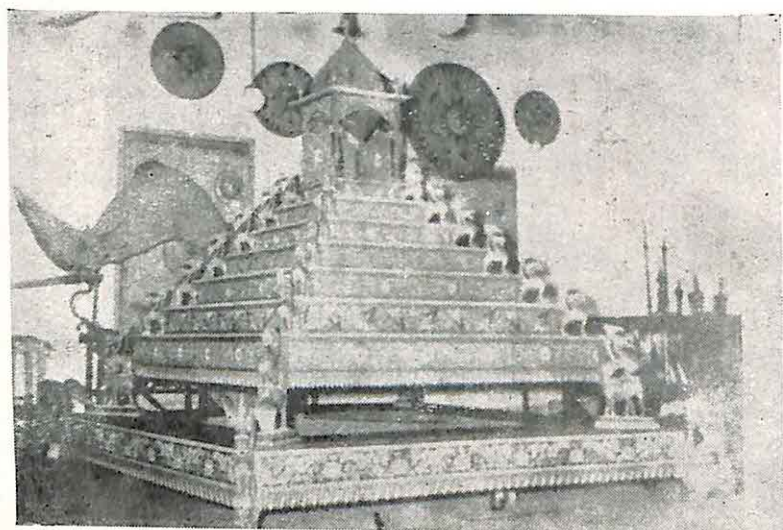


PLATE XV
Wood Carving
Barpeta Satra

